

Happy 'Eid Al Fitr

TO CELEBRATE 'Eid Al Fitr all ministries and government departments will observe a public holiday from Sunday to Wednesday. The Jordan Times will continue publishing throughout the holidays to cover His Majesty King Hussein's safe return on Tuesday. We wish our readers and advertisers a very happy 'Eid Al Fitr.

Jordan Times

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PNA releases prisoners for end of Ramadan

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) Sunday released dozens of political prisoners to mark the festival of Eid Al Fitr which ends the fasting month of Ramadan. "These prisoners, mainly members of the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad and Hamas, had been held without trial for more than a year, and their release was ordered by President Yasser Arafat," a high ranking PNA official told AFP. The official said the prisoners, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed the releases but expressed dissatisfaction. "This will not be enough as long as such leaders as Abdul Aziz Rantisi, Ibrahim Makdameh and Jamal Natsbeh remain in prison," he told AFP.

Israeli plot to assassinate Saddam — report

LONDON (AFP) — Israel planned to assassinate Iraqi President Saddam Hussein last month, but cancelled the operation at the last minute because it coincided with U.S.-British air attacks on Iraq, it was reported here Sunday. The Sunday Times said that Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, had devised a plan to kill President Hussein with guided missiles during a visit to his mistress in northwestern Iraq. But after months of training by Israeli commandos, which were to have been flown into Iraq, the plan was shelved because of the air attacks and because Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon and Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai refused to give final approval, said the British weekly. They apparently doubted the accuracy of Mossad's information about Saddam Hussein's whereabouts, according to the Sunday Times.

Colombia orders arrest of former EU ambassador

BOGOTA (R) — Colombian prosecutors have ordered the arrest of the country's former ambassador to the European Union on suspicion of organizing ultra-right death squads, local media reported on Sunday. Carlos Arturo Marulanda quit as Colombia's envoy to Brussels in November 1996 when the European Parliament raised questions about his links to an outlawed paramilitary group operating on his family's sprawling estate in Colombia's northern Cesar province. The gang was accused by the military in the early 1990s of killing at least four peasants and forcing more than 130 families to flee Marulanda's 6,000 hectare Bellocruz estate at the start of the decade.

Taliban hang amputated feet in Kabul as warning

KABUL (AFP) — Amputated feet of six Taliban soldiers convicted of highway robbery have been hung from trees around the streets here, residents said Sunday. Local residents said the feet had been hanging at the cross roads and outside main mosques as a warning that the ruling militia will not tolerate crime or dissension from within its own ranks. "The feet were strung up soon after the public amputations on Friday and they've been hanging there ever since. People stop and look, it's quite a surprising sight," one resident told AFP.

King refutes reports on external interference in Jordan's affairs

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein on Sunday denied news reports alleging the King reached agreements with U.S. officials while in Washington on sweeping reforms that would determine the future of Jordan and its leadership. His Majesty, quoted by a Royal Court statement released late Sunday, denied that such meetings with American or non-American officials took place as various mass media have been reporting since the King started treatment at Mayo Clinic in mid-July.

Iraq weighs U.N. initiatives, vows to fight no-fly zones

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq said Sunday it was weighing French and Russian initiatives on future cooperation with the U.N. Security Council, as President Saddam Hussein called for a new Eastern bloc to counter U.S. domination. It also vowed to keep up its challenges of U.S. and British patrols of "no-fly" zones as the Baghdad press trumpeted victory over the United States on the eighth anniversary of the "Mother of All Battles."

Palestinian-Israeli meeting planned in U.S. next month

RAMALLAH (R) — Senior Israeli and Palestinian officials will meet in Washington in February to try to revive U.S.-brokered peace moves frozen by Israel, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Sunday. Joined by U.S. Middle East Envoy Dennis Ross, this will be the first public trilateral meeting since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of peace moves prompted Israel's parliament to move national elections up to May 17.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Efiy Ben-Matityahu said ministry policy adviser Tomer Orni would head Israel's delegation to the Washington meeting, replacing Danny Navet, who quit to run for parliament from the rightist Likud Party. "The joint Israeli-Palestinian monitoring and steering committee will hold its first meeting since Netanyahu called for elections in early February," Erekat told Reuters. "There will be a comprehensive review of the peace process and where we are at now," he said. He said the Palestinian National Authority would ask

the future of Jordan, succession to the throne and arrangements for changes after the King's return home," the statement said. "His Majesty stresses that no such meetings took place with American or non-American officials and emphasises that all other news reports made since the King began his treatment and until the aforementioned article dealing with the King's health, Jordan's future and what goes in His Majesty's mind are mere speculation," added the statement. "In reality, no meetings were held to discuss what was mentioned because His Majesty, based on his convictions, is the one to decide all that serves Jordan's interests, security and the role of the

Chances of summit slim as Saudis rally opposition

ARMING Iraq to be replaced and the oil embargo lifted. While also calling for an end to the oil embargo, France has proposed a strict regime of monitoring Iraq's weapons and resources to ensure Baghdad does not return. Baghdad is insisting on an immediate and unconditional lifting of the embargo, which is linked to its disarmament and was slapped on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait which led to the Gulf War. Iraq is also demanding that the no-fly zones be scrapped. On Sunday, the leadership warned that "Iraq is determined to protect its airspace against the aggressions of the United States and Britain."

Turkey criticises Italy over Ocalan departure

ANKARA (AP) — A day after a Kurdish rebel leader left Rome on a quest for a haven, his destination remained a secret and Turkey remained displeased by Italy's refusal to extradite. The Italian premier's office on Saturday night said Abdullah Ocalan had left Italy, after two months in the country which he had hoped would give him asylum. Ocalan had left several hours earlier on a private plane from Rome's Ciampino airport. Italian state TV said Sunday. He left a villa on the outskirts of the capital at a moment when the usual throng of Turkish journalists staking out the site wasn't there, Italian news reports said.

the United States to reaffirm publicly that the Palestinians had complied with the terms of the deal they signed with Israel at the White House last October. Netanyahu's coalition splintered over the deal ceding occupied West Bank land to the Palestinians. Then parliament moved elections forward from late 2000 after he

Hashemite leadership in serving the nation along with other members of the large Jordanian family of various origins," said the statement. The King, the statement continued, considers all such decisions as an internal Jordanian and Hashemite affair as was the case throughout the King's reign. "No-one has the right to speculate on what goes in the King's mind regarding decisions that he considers from time to time a necessity aiming to correct the path and to achieve more stability and security for all Jordanians." The King, added the statement, is following up closely all that is happening and he consumes all available means to reach the best decision to serve the Kingdom and the

economic, political and military fields and want to safeguard world peace." Such a grouping was now a must, because of "the policy of the United States, Britain, Zionism and their allies which has become a danger for security and stability in the world." The call came as Saudi Arabia rejected efforts to convene an Arab summit in the wake of last month's air war on Iraq waged by Washington and London. The call was directed at Arab and Asian countries in particular, but "not targeted against anyone," he said in a speech broadcast by Iraqi television and radio exactly eight years after the launch of the 1991 Gulf War.

On the occasion of EID AL-FITR

Arabic Bank is honoured to convey to HIS MAJESTY KING HUSSEIN And His Royal Highness CROWN PRINCE HASSAN together with the Jordanian people, the Arab and the Islamic nations, its felicitations and best wishes.

ARAB BANK

British couple, four Dutch kidnapped in Yemen

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Four Dutch citizens and two Britons were kidnapped by unidentified men in Yemen on Sunday, Dutch foreign ministry officials said. The six were seized while driving from Sada, in the north of the country, toward Sanaa, Ministry spokesman Arjen Lekkerkerker said. There was no immediate indication of who was behind the kidnapping or their motives. In London, the British Foreign Office said officials were trying to contact the families of the missing British pair. It declined to give their identities.



PREPARATIONS FOR KING'S RETURN: A vendor Sunday distributes pictures of His Majesty King Hussein to a motorist in Amman, ahead of the King's return to Jordan on Tuesday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Agricultural sector concerned over government's drought measures

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — With the state of drought that was officially declared late Saturday, the agriculture sector will be limited by restrictions that are certain to anger farmers. According to a scheme prepared by the government to cope with the drought currently affecting Jordan, amounts of water used for agriculture in the Jordan Valley will be rationed, while a ban on some plants that require high amounts of water is possible. The Water Authority will reduce the amount of water pumped to the Southern Ghor region for agricultural use by 50 per cent, to the Northern Ghor by 20 per cent and to the central Ghor by 10 per cent. At present, around 650 million cubic metres (mcm) of water a year are used for agriculture, part of which is non-renewable, according to water experts. The authority is currently studying "difficult" regulations to ration water supplies

for bananas and citrus fruits, while summer crops such as mallow, eggplant and corn could be prohibited. The plans drew the criticism of agricultural industry leaders. "These measures will harm a JD3 billion agricultural industry in the Jordan Valley," the chairman of the Jordan Exporters and Producers Association for Fruits and Vegetables, Khairiddin Shukri, told the Jordan Times. "I believe that the government does not know how to manage crises properly." Shukri said the authorities should have made long-term plans earlier to meet the problem. "The Disi project should have been implemented a long time ago to cover Amman's needs, and the Yarmouk River's water should go to agricultural projects in the area instead of being treated for domestic use," he added. Several weeks ago, the government signed an \$800,000 agreement with a local firm to

dig two deep wells in Karak in order to examine the quality of the 30,000-year-old Disi aquifer. Last October, the government solicited around 51 local, Arab and foreign firms to pre-qualify for the \$730 million plan on a build, operate and transfer basis to draw water to Amman from the Disi aquifer in the south of the country. The project will entail drilling wells and building a pumping station and a 325-kilometre water pipeline from the Disi aquifer to the capital for the delivery of 100 mcm per year by 2005. The Yarmouk River currently provides the Kingdom with only 135 mcm of its full 220 mcm share set by an Arab League committee in 1987. In addition to the private sector's heavy investment in the Jordan Valley, the government has spent JD1 billion in infrastructure there since the 1950s, according to Shukri.

(Continued on page 3)



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(Continued on page 2)

Yemeni president issues appeal for Arab summit

SANAA (AFP) — Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh launched an emotive appeal on Sunday for an Arab summit focusing on healing rifts between Arab states.

In a speech marking the start of the 'Eid Al Fitr festival, Saleh said a summit of Arab leaders was needed to "review objectively" the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990 and the ensuing Gulf war.

This review would allow Arab leaders "to make a fresh start based on transparency and openness and to work together to reignite a spirit of solidarity and cooperation," he said, the official SABA news agency reported.

Saleh called on Arab states to agree on several principles, including "non-interference in internal affairs and the recognition of every

country's right to exercise sovereignty over its territory."

He also urged them "to avoid all recourse to force and all threats of force to resolve conflicts" between them and also to reject "all recourse to force by others" against an Arab country.

The president's speech implicitly criticised Iraq for its threats against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but also the help given last month by those two countries to U.S.-British missile strikes on Iraq.

Saleh also urged Arab states to recognise their mistakes and the harm they had inflicted on one another.

The Gulf Arab states are demanding that Iraq apologise for the Kuwaiti invasion and occupation, which Baghdad has refused to do. "It is not shameful for a

brother, whatever its geographic, demographic or economic weight, to make concessions to another brother," the Yemeni president said.

"Our [Arab] Nation exists today in a divisive situation because of the plots hatched by those who have done everything possible to keep it weak and unable to defend itself," he said.

"The time has come to turn over this black page of our history."

The president's speech came ahead of an Arab League meeting Jan. 24 in Cairo aimed at discussing a Yemeni proposal to hold an Arab summit on Iraq following the U.S.-British missile strikes.

The Gulf Arab states are opposed to such a summit if Iraq participates. Riyadh-based diplomats have said.

Egypt urges no new British-U.S. strikes on Iraq with end of Ramadan

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt hopes there will be no new British and U.S. air and missile strikes on Iraq with the ending of the fasting month of Ramadan Sunday, Foreign Minister Amr Mousa said.

"I hope that that won't happen and that a diplomatic solution will be found to the Iraqi crisis," he told journalists.

Four days of British-U.S. air and missile strikes last month ended shortly after the beginning of Ramadan and analysts speculated that the strikes would resume once the fast had ended.

But U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen in Tokyo Thursday denied any set plan to attack Iraq after the end of the holy month. "We will take appropriate

action but we have made no specific plans pertaining to Ramadan," he said.

Mousa also dismissed Iraqi press criticism of a recent series of meetings between Arab foreign ministers hosted by Cairo.

"Consultations under way between some Arab ministers cannot be described as plots. It would be reversing the situation," Mousa told reporters.

Iraq's official Al Thawra daily on Friday slammed the latest meeting in Cairo as a tactic to divert attention away from Iraqi demands for a lifting of the U.N. embargo.

The consultations, between Egypt, Oman, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen were aimed at coordinating their positions

ahead of a meeting of the Arab League scheduled for Jan. 24 to discuss the situation in Iraq.

Meanwhile, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid said next week's meeting will strive to find ways to lift eight-year-old U.N. sanctions on Iraq.

"Serious and sincere attempts are under way at the Arab League to find a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis," he told reporters.

"We have a tough mission ahead of us," he said.

Abdul Meguid accused Iraq of responsibility for the crisis which prompted London and Washington to launch Operation Desert Fox.

Turkey criticises Italy over Ocalan departure

(Continued from page 1)

The Germany-based Kurdish news agency DEM said in a faxed statement Sunday that, according to officials of the Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK), Ocalan had reached his destination safely. But nobody, including the PKK and Ocalan's lawyer in Italy, was revealing the destination.

Italian media had said he had flown to Moscow. Russia's ambassador denied Sunday that the rebel

leader was in Russia. It was also possible that the flight might have only been the first leg of a long journey toward a haven.

"What is essential is that the leader of the bloody terrorist organisation cannot find refuge anywhere in the world," declared Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit.

The PKK has been fighting for Kurdish autonomy in southeastern Turkey for 14 years. The conflict has killed around 37,000 people.

Ankara wanted Italy to extradite Ocalan so he could be tried by Turkish courts on terrorism charges, but Italy refused, citing its laws that forbid extradition of suspects who could face the death penalty.

"Despite Turkish insistence that justice be applied, Italian authorities have given the terrorist leader the opportunity to leave Rome," said a statement by the Turkish foreign ministry.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taliban offers amnesty to its foes

ISLAMABAD (R) — Afghanistan's Taliban movement on Sunday offered an amnesty to its foes on the occasion of the Muslim festival of 'Eid Al Fitr if they joined the ruling militia and ceased hostilities. Taliban-controlled Kabul Radio, monitored in Islamabad, quoted Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar as saying on the eve of 'Eid Al Fitr that opposition fighters would be given safety guarantees if they joined the militia. "Once again using this opportunity, I ask the opposition to stop opposing the Islamic Emirate [Taliban government] and avoid destroying their fellow countrymen's homes and property," Omar was quoted as saying. "I assure them safety of life and property if they stand side by side with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."

Four shepherds killed in Algeria

ALGIERS (AP) — Armed men killed four shepherds and injured another in a weekend attack southwest of Algiers, according to a government statement. The gunmen attacked the shepherds Saturday evening near Ain Defla, 75 miles southwest of the capital, the statement said. The shepherds were returning home with their head of sheep when they were stopped by the group of armed men, residents of the area reported. There was no claim of responsibility and no further details were provided on the attack, which occurred in an area where Islamic insurgents are thought to be hiding.

Arabs want sanctions eased, rules observed

CAIRO (AP) — Arab countries favour the easing of U.N. sanctions against Iraq but also insist that Iraq abide by U.N. resolutions, the head of the Arab League said Sunday. Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid, who heads the 22-member league, spoke with reporters after meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mousa. It was the latest in a series of preparatory meetings for a Jan. 24 session of Arab League foreign ministers on Iraq. "The Arab countries have a genuine desire to end the sufferings of the Iraqi people and reach a solution to the embargo imposed on Iraq," Abdul Meguid said. "But they insist that Iraq should be committed to implement all the Security Council's resolutions," he added.

Kuwait accuses Iraq of breach of resolutions

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Kuwait's cabinet on Sunday slammed Iraq threats to scrap recognition of their U.N.-demarcated border as a flagrant breach of Security Council resolutions. "The cabinet reasserts its rejection and condemnation of these measures and reiterates its position," the official news agency KUNA reported, exactly eight years after the launch of the 1991 Gulf war over Kuwait. The cabinet charged that the statements "reflect negligence of resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Resolution 833 on the demarcation of the border, which had been accepted by Iraq without conditions." Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said last week that Baghdad refuses to apologise for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, while the Iraqi parliament called for the scrapping of U.N. resolutions including the border demarcation.

PM raps Barak over support for spy

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chided Labour opposition leader Ehud Barak on Sunday for failing to back a bid to secure the release of Jonathan Pollard who is serving a life term in the United States for spying for Israel. "I am terribly disappointed at Mr. Barak's refusal to sign a request for Pollard's release," Netanyahu told a weekly meeting of his cabinet. "It is not a matter of domestic politics, and I hoped there would be a national consensus to strengthen the chances of Pollard's release," he said, according to a statement published by his office. But a spokesman for Barak said Netanyahu had so far demonstrated his inability to handle such a complex and sensitive case. "It is obvious that Israel owes Pollard a debt of gratitude but it is doubtful that the rumpus surrounding the affair is beneficial to him," he said.

Amal fighters clash with Israeli patrol

TYRE (AFP) — The Syrian-backed Shiite Muslim Amal militia said Sunday it had "wounded or killed" four members of an Israeli patrol in southern Lebanon, and had one of its own men injured. Amal said the attack happened on the night of Saturday to Sunday in the central sector of the Israeli-occupied zone of southern Lebanon between the Israeli positions of Taybeh and Qantara. An Amal commando managed to return to the zone to pick up the wounded militiaman on Sunday, the group said. Security sources in the region have not confirmed the report. On Saturday Amal shelled nine positions held by Israeli troops and their allied South Lebanon Army on the edge of the zone, without inflicting casualties.



Lebanese shoppers buy cookies from a vendor in a Sidon street in south Lebanon on Sunday. Sunday is the last day of Ramadan, the Islamic Holy Month of fasting. Monday will bring the beginning of the three-day 'Eid Al Fitr, or the feast of the breaking of the fast (AP photo)

Tehran launches probe into hard-liners' disruption of prayers

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's interior ministry has launched an investigation into the violent disruption of weekly Muslim prayers by Islamic fundamentalists in the central city of Esfahan last week, newspapers reported Sunday.

A fact-finding mission has been sent to Esfahan to "examine the origins of the incident and try and identify those responsible," the papers said.

During the prayer ceremony in Esfahan on Friday, a group of religious hardliners heckled and threw objects at prayer leader Ayatollah Jafar Mahdavi and provincial governor Jafar Musavi — both allies of moderate President Mohammad Khatami and strong critics of political violence.

The incident angered Khatami's supporters who demanded tougher action against the perpetrators of the political violence waged against Iranian reformists over the past two years.

Taheri's weekly prayer sermons in Esfahan are often marked by tension and scuffles between moderates and fundamentalists. The ayatollah later blasted the extremists for "offending the sacred position of the prayer ceremony," reformist newspapers reported.

He said he would hold a replacement prayer for the one disrupted on Friday, which coincided with the International Quds (Jerusalem) Day, held in Iran on the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan in solidarity with the Palestini-

ans. Taheri has linked Islamic extremists to a recent spate of murders of dissidents and intellectuals, in which the country's intelligence service has been implicated.

The murders have caused uproar in Iran and a bitter war of words between Khatami's backers and his hardline opponents.

Sobh-e-Emrooz (This Morning), a pro-Khatami newspaper reported Sunday that two reformist clerics were arrested in Esfahan this week.

Alireza Farzaneh-Khu and Mansur Yar-Mohammadi, both active in local politics, were remanded in custody by a special court charged with dealing with offences committed by clerics.

Afghan opposition seizes key supply routes

KABUL (AFP) — Afghan opposition forces have taken advantage of the end of Ramadan and seized two key supply routes leading to Taliban-held cities Mazari-Sharif and Bamiyan, sources said Sunday.

Forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood had escalated fighting ahead of the Eid Al Fitr festival in north west Faryab and central Bamiyan provinces, the sources said.

"Usually this is a time of peace and perhaps Masood has used this to his advantage," one foreign aid source told AFP.

Foreign aid workers confirmed Sheerin Tagab in Faryab had fallen to the anti-Taliban alliance, enabling Masood to disrupt the militia's supply network.

Sheerin Tagab lies on the main highway extending eastwards through Jauzjan and its

capital Sheerghon, then on to Mazari-Sharif in Balkh in the country's far north.

Balkh capital Mazari-Sharif fell to the Taliban on Aug. 8 last year during the militia's sweeping northern offensive which also won them control of Bamiyan on Sept. 13.

Control and security in both cities is crucial to Taliban ambitions of establishing itself as Afghanistan's sole ruling party.

The opposition has captured Sheerin Tagab from the Taliban and we are receiving reports of heavy fighting," the head of a foreign aid organisation told AFP.

He said foreign aid workers, including staffers from the French medical outfit Medicins Sans Frontieres, were working in the area.

"But there have been no reports of casualties," he added. Opposition forces have also seized Yawkawlang on the main

highway to the west of Bamiyan. Masood spokesman Abdullah said.

Masood captured the city a month ago but it was retaken by the Taliban after a dispute with the factions that make up the anti-Taliban alliance.

Abdullah said fighting had been heavy and began early Saturday. Independent sources said they could verify fighting in the region.

Both cities have alternative supply routes but analysts said the seizing of both highways appears to be part of a harassment campaign designed by Masood to maintain the pressure on the Taliban.

Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar has taken the extraordinary step of ordering all militia troops to stay at their posts during the three days Eid Al Fitr holiday period.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

12:00 "The Count of Monte Cristo"
01:00 Cartoon — Batman
01:30 Feature Film "Friendship's Field"
15:00 The American Chat Show
15:45 Circus
18:15 Vid kids
16:45 French Varieties
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Prog.
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 The Parenthood
20:00 World Net
20:30 Drama — Big Sky
21:15 Mini Series "Playing the Field" Eps. 2
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature Film "The Hot Rock"
23:30 Comedy — Perfect Stranger
23:59 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

05:11 Fajr
06:32 (Sunrise) Duha
11:46 Dhur
14:36 Asr
17:00 Maghreb
18:21 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Swedieh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366

ANGELICAN Church

Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church

Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church

Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel.

5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel.

5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel.

4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel.

5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel.

4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel.

4646138

Church of Presentation, Swedieh Tel.

5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church Tel.

4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel.

4892679

The Baptist Church Tel.

4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church

4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel.

4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Cold weather conditions will prevail with skies cloudy to partly

cloudy. Occasional scattered showers are expected. Winds westerly moderate to active. In Agaba, it will be rainy and cloudy to partly cloudy with expected scattered showers. Winds northerly moderate to active and seas rough.

Min/Max. temp.

Amman 04/10

Agaba 10/19

Deserts 04/11

Jordan Valley 08/17

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 09 Agaba 19 Humidity readings: Amman 94 per cent, Agaba 40 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 01/13

Jerash 03/13

Um Qays 02/12

Madaba 02/10

Petra 03/12

Dead Sea 08/20

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Abbas Hakim 4885446
Dr. Arafat Ashhab 5602507
Dr. Ayman Mubarek 4875748

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Tel. 4773111-19

Dr. Jamal Jbarah 5347351

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadad Pharmacy 5537004
Rakni Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Mohammad Al Shari 02/7100588
Fou'ad Pharmacy 02/725360

ZARQA:
Dr. Mazen Salfarini 09/985832
Palestine Pharmacy 09/983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade 4617101

Blood Bank 4775121

Highway Police 5343402

Traffic Police 4896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints 5605800

Price Complaints 5661176

Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467

Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101

Jordan Television

Radio Jordan 4774111

Water Authority 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co. 4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic Abdi 5665131/7

Hussein Medical Centre 5856856

Luzmila 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6

Akileh Maternity 4642412/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362

Majhas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071

Shmeisani Hospital 5607431

Jordan Hospital 5607550

University Hospital 5353444

Al-Muasher Hospital 566727/9

Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3

Al-Bashir 4775111/2/5

Army, Marka 4891611/1/5

Queen Alia Hospital 5157100

Amal Hospital 5607155

Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital 09/983323

Zarqa National Hospital 09/900560

Ibn Sina Hospital 09/986731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital 10-00

New Delhi (RJ) 10-05

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital 02/275555

Roman Catholic Hospital 02/272275

Ibn Al Nafies Hospital 18-35

Casablanca, Turis (RJ) 19-00

Streets tingle with anticipation as Jordan awaits King Hussein

Foreign dignitaries expected to arrive Tuesday with more to follow



A JORDANIAN BEDOUIN passes a huge poster of King Hussein embracing his brother Crown Prince Hassan on a main street in Amman. Thousands of pictures of King Hussein and Jordanian flags decorated Amman to celebrate the King's homecoming. (Reuters photo)

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — As the streets of the Kingdom prickled with anticipation of the return of His Majesty King Hussein, expected tomorrow, senior officials yesterday said a number of Arab and foreign leaders have expressed their intent to join in celebrations and congratulate the King on his recovery.

Arab well-wishers who are expected to arrive tomorrow to welcome the King and to participate in Jordan's celebrations, the source told the Jordan Times on Sunday.

United Arab Emirates Army Commander in Chief Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed and Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid of Dubai, said the official source.

Prince Abdullah, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Sultan of Brunei, Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah have all expressed an intention to visit the King.

King Hussein, left Jordan in early July 1998 to undergo treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

The King received a clean bill of health after six sessions of chemotherapy and a stem-cell transplant at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, in the U.S.

According to the source, "the King, who is expected to pilot his own aircraft accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Noor, is due to land at Marka military airport at about three in the afternoon."

More than a million people are readying for an effusive welcome and counting down the hours for their first encounter with their king for the first time in six months.

Minister of Information Nasser Judeh yesterday held a press conference at the Al Hussein Sports City where he reviewed all procedures and arrangements for the King's arrival tomorrow.

"Indeed it is going to be the happiest day when we celebrate both 'Eid Al Fitr and the King's safe return to his family," Judeh said.

Judeh reiterated the King's call Saturday night that Jordanians refrain from firing arms and driving recklessly.

celebrate his return," said Judeh.

Deputy Chief of Protocol Faisal Fayed, said in the press conference that "His Majesty is expected to arrive at Marka military airport on Tuesday, where he will be greeted by Royal family members, ministers, senators, deputies, Arab and foreign ambassadors, and dignitaries."

The King's motorcade will pass through downtown Amman to his home, Bab Al Salam, in Hummar west of Amman.

Both the government and private sector are putting the final touches on plans for events to celebrate the long-awaited King's return. Amman Mayor Nidal Hadid announced Sunday that Greater Amman Municipality arranged several programmes to celebrate the event.

Teams from the Greater Amman Municipality finished raising flags, millions of coloured lights and thousands of banners and giant posters of the King across the streets of the capital.

"We are planning to organise a convoy consisting of 200 cars covered with flowers, and carrying maquette for several major projects and industries in the Kingdom," Hadid said.

He said the municipality will celebrate the King's safe return today with fireworks and building bedouin tents that will be located along the King's motorcade.

Aerial displays, military parades, dancing troupes and poetry recitals are part of the planned nationwide festivities to welcome the King home.

Other governments are making their own preparations.

The Ministry of Information announced Sunday that some 400 local and international journalists have requested special permits and technical facilities to cover the Jordanian people's meeting with their king.

The ministry has also prepared for live TV and radio coverage of the Kingdom's celebrations, which are expected to last for three days.

On Thursday, the Press and Publications Department announced that any journalist seeking to cover the King's arrival should contact the Jordan Press Office at the Inter-Continental Hotel, in order to obtain a permit before Tuesday.

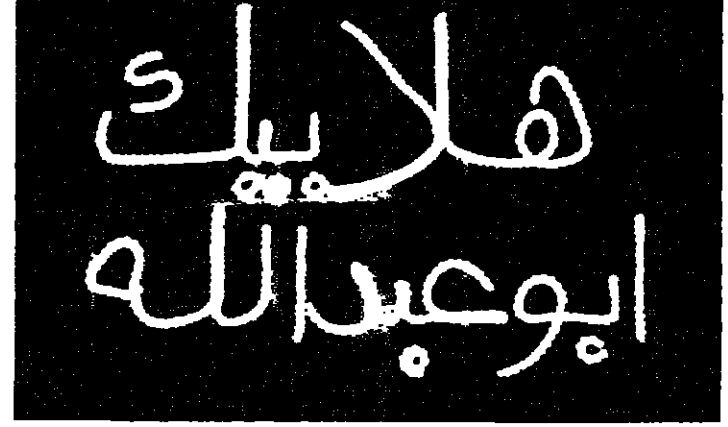
The King's televised address on

Saturday has rendered mixed feelings of high hopes, joy, and expectation among Jordanians.

"There is a high degree of anticipation after the King's address to the nation that he plans to launch a comprehensive review of the country's progress and the challenges facing the Kingdom," said one observer.

"We should soon make a comprehensive review of our nation's progress and address all issues and challenges that occupy our minds or handicap our blessed progress," the King said in his address, broadcast from his residence in the U.K.

Over a million people lined the streets of Amman to welcome the King back home after he underwent surgery in 1992 to remove a kidney found to have cancerous cells.



WELCOME HOME: A lighted sign posted on Gardens Street reads 'Welcome Back Abu Abdullah' (Photo by Yousef Allan)



Christians hold special prayer services for King Hussein's safe return

PRAYERS FOR A SAFE RETURN: Bishop Sylvestros Al Far leads prayers at the Greek Orthodox Church in Amman (Photo by Yousef Allan)

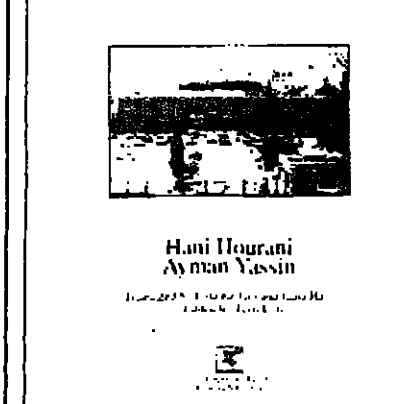
AMMAN (Petra) — Christian communities in Jordan on Sunday held special prayers at churches thanking God for the recovery of His Majesty King Hussein and his imminent return to Jordan.

Head of the Roman Catholic Church in Jordan Bishop Salim Sayegh said Jordanian Christians are proud of the Hashemite leadership and express their affection and continued loyalty to the Monarch.

Head of the Greek Orthodox Community in Jordan Bishop Sylvestros Al Far paid tribute to King Hussein's endeavours at home and abroad and his keenness on ensuring true unity among Muslims and Christians in the Kingdom.

Book profiles Jordan's elected representatives

WHO'S WHO IN THE JORDANIAN PARLIAMENT 1997-2001



BOOK REVIEW

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — Al Urdu Al Jadid Research Centre, one of the few independent institutions specialised

in monitoring and analysing Jordan's political liberalisation process, has recently launched its second guide to Parliament.

"Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament — 1997-2001," available in both English and Arabic, "aims to serve as a comprehensive guide to the current Parliament," elected last November, said Al Urdu Al Jadid Director Hani Hourani.

"It provides a history and chronology of Jordan's legislative and parliamentary life through 1998 and includes personal, professional, and political histories of Upper and Lower House members," Hourani added.

The 225-page publication, put together by Hourani and Ayman Yassin, and published by Sindbad Publishing House, opens with an introduction to legislative and parliamentary life in Jordan since 1928, including an overview of Parliament's role in the political and constitutional systems.

While Hourani is known to researchers and insiders through his centre's activities and publications, 25-year-old Yassin, who graduated as a public law specialist from the

University of Tunisia, is a newcomer to Jordan's academic scene.

Their analysis on the impact of the current elections law, that applies the one-person, one-vote system to unequal constituencies, concludes that "a new Electoral Law must be enacted which takes into consideration the demographic distribution of people and the important changes that have been introduced in Jordan's political life."

A dispute between the government and the opposition, led by the powerful Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front, lingered for more than a year before culminating with the opposition's boycott of the last elections. Hourani and Yassin say that the boycott greatly affected the turn-out in the November 1997 polls.

Following a chronology of Jordan's legislative and parliamentary life since 1921, when the first central government in Transjordan was formed, "Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament" features detailed profiles of the Senate's current 40 members, in addition to seven senators who left the Upper House last year, mostly to participate in the cur-

rent government of Fayed Tarawneh.

Readers can apprise themselves of a comprehensive detailing of senators' and former senators' backgrounds, ranging from academic qualifications, professional and political history, membership in civil institutions, down to the awards and medals they have received.

Following that chapter are the profiles of the 80 Lower House members, completed by supplementary tables illustrating population and voter statistics, comparisons between the 1989, 1993, and 1997 elections and Parliaments, and blocs in the current Lower House, as well as classifications of senators and deputies according to their educational qualifications, age, and profession.

Providing a host of useful and updated information on the constitutionally highest political body of Jordan, "Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament, 1997-2001" promises to become an important reference for insiders, media representatives, diplomats, researchers, and anybody who wants to know more about Jordan's young democratic march.

JTC expected to announce steps towards mobile phone service

King urges Internet availability to all Jordanians

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordan Telecommunications Corporation (JTC) is expected to announce soon steps to establish a mobile phone service.

The service will be the second such service in the country after Jordan Mobile Telephone Services (Fastlink), whose exclusivity period ended last November.

The move has been expected in view of the government's announcement last month that it intended to issue a licence to the JTC by the end of 1998, and in the light of His Majesty King Hussein's recent message sent to JTC Chairman Ali Shukri, expressing appreciation of his efforts to advance mobile phone services in Jordan. King

Hussein urged the JTC chairman to extend the service to all areas of the Kingdom.

In his message, the King said he "had been following closely the corporation's achievements over the past few years in the course of providing telephone services to the public and earning income for the state treasury."

"All the corporation's workers are a source of deep pride for me in view of their distinguished service that has enabled the corporation to open one of the most successful institutions in the Kingdom," the King wrote.

King Hussein told Shukri that he "had followed JTC's ambitious plans and projects since the moment you assumed your duty which you have

been faithfully upheld. You have pursued continuous efforts with remarkable efficiency and accomplishment, a gift you have always manifested throughout the years of service that you spent close to me."

Expressing his confidence and support for JTC to accomplish further achievements, the King expressed hope that the JTC will undertake as soon as possible the necessary steps to expand mobile phone services to all Jordanians.

He also voiced hope that the JTC will exert efforts to make Internet services available to all Jordanians and in all schools at a level equal to those offered in technologically advanced nations.

The King blessed the JTC's work and expressed full support for its endeavours. He also voiced hope that the two projects will see the light as soon as possible.

Fastlink nearly a year and a half ago protested against what it called a "government violation" of its agreement with the firm when the government decided to grant a second licence to the JTC before the end of Fastlink's Nov. 1, 1998 exclusivity expiration date without issuing an open tender.

Fastlink in December of 1997 filed a suit against the government at the Higher Court of Justice for alleged breach of contract, but the court decided last month that it had no jurisdiction to rule on the case.

Agricultural sector concerned over drought measures

(Continued from page 1)

An emergency governmental committee working on contingency plans to combat the looming drought has decided to reduce the price of barley from around JD100 per tonne to JD87 and the price of bran from around JD95 per tonne to JD77, and to keep fodder distribution centres open all over the country.

But the director of Arab Traders Incorporated, Abdul Ilah Tabba, said the decision will harm grain traders, especially since the government recently allowed them to import 100,000 tonnes of oats as

part in preparation to cope with the problem.

"What will the traders do now that these prices have been settled?" asked Tabba.

He added that the new government's prices for fodder will undercut private sector traders.

Interior Minister Nayef Qadi, head of the emergency committee, said the government might ask the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, and other similar bodies to provide Jordan with financial and in-kind assistance to cope with the effects of the drought if the winter ends with inadequate

amounts of rainfall.

In a statement issued after Saturday's Cabinet session, Agriculture Minister Mijhem Kreisheh said the government will set up a fund to ensure JD12 million in interest-free loans to livestock breeders in order to help them buy barley and grain at reduced prices.

Kreisheh added that the government will also allocate JD500,000 for livestock medicines and that grazing reserves will be open to the public.

These measures are designed to help breeders of over three million heads of livestock in Jordan deal with the problem of providing feed for their animals.

The Kingdom annually produces only 30,000 tonnes of the 500,000 tonnes of barley needed to feed cattle and 13,000 of the 15,000 tonnes of bran required.

In addition, the ministries of water and irrigation and agriculture will provide water for livestock from desert wells and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation will continue rationing water supplies.

The ministry plan will give priority to drinking water, increasing the amount of water pumped to Amman by 10 mcm from the Yarmouk River and Lake Tiberias, which supplies the country with 60-

80 mcm annually. The Amman governorate receives around 90 mcm a year, according to an official report.

The authority will also start storing the Yarmouk's water in Al Karameh Dam, which has a 19 mcm capacity, to meet Amman's needs.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILMS

- "Le Capitain" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh at 8:30 p.m.
- "L.A. Confidential" at Books@Cafe, Jabal Amman on Tuesday, Jan. 19, at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650457).

EXHIBITIONS

- Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.
- "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.
- The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

BBC denies World Service broadcasts to be cut

LONDON (R) — The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Sunday denied it was poised to make swingeing cuts in the World Service and said it was still in discussion with the government about its future format.

The denial followed a lengthy report in The Observer newspaper that the BBC had finalised plans for major cutbacks in the broadcast service, including the closure of its German and Czech operations.

The Observer said the cuts were part of a three-year plan to slash £21 million (\$35 million) from the budget.

Broadcasts in Hungarian, Russian, Arabic and Thai would also be slashed and 100 jobs would go, it said.

The newspaper said it had obtained secret BBC documents detailing proposals drawn up by World Service chief executive Mark Byford to cover a shortfall in funding from the Foreign Office, which finances the service.

But the BBC called the report inaccurate.

"The picture painted by

The Observer is inaccurate, misinformed and misleading. The plan's main aim will be focus on investing in key developments utilising the (government's financial) settlement in the most effective manner in order to maintain the World Service's position as the world's leading international operator," it said in a statement.

Last July, the government announced plans to increase the £161 million grant it pays to the World Service over the next three years by around £45 million. But the settlement fell short of the BBC's bid for a £65 million increase in funding.

Any major cuts in services are likely to spark a political row, especially since Foreign Secretary Robin Cook has made no secret of the need to defend the World Service.

A Foreign Office spokesman Sunday said talks were continuing between officials and the BBC but said he could not comment on the details.

"Discussions going on are on the World Service's

plans on how to spend the money from the settlement," he said.

The Observer said the plan would be presented to the BBC's board of governors Thursday, to Cook Friday and parliament's public accounts committee on Feb. 3. A formal announcement will be made by Feb. 7.

It said one of the BBC documents it had obtained was a media plan on how best to sell the idea of the cuts.

This said the key lines to take would be the need for "a reallocation of priorities" and to stress that "the World Service is changing, in response to audience needs and a highly competitive international broadcasting environment".

The row will also bring yet more ire on the head of Director-General John Birt, already under attack for many of his strategies to modernise the BBC.

The World Service is one of the world's most popular international broadcasters with news broadcasts in 45 languages and an audience of 124 million worldwide.

Myanmar offers to be 'gentle' with opposition

BANGKOK (AFP) — Fearing Myanmar military intelligence chief Khin Nyunt has promised to be gentle and lenient with the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi, a U.S. congressman said Sunday.

Representative Tony Hall said he met Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt last week in Yangon to discuss the plight of the Myanmar people as the economy labours under international sanctions and an investment drought.

Khin Nyunt "promised to be gentle and lenient to the opposition and try to find areas of agreement despite recent rhetoric carried in government newspapers," said Hall, who did not attempt to interpret the statement.

The Democrat congressman from Ohio said however that he had seen no sign the government was prepared to make concessions in its bitter eight-year political battle with the opposition.

U.S. diplomats in Yangon said it was the first such statement by the military government, Hall reported.

It remained far from clear however if it was intended as a genuine expression of tolerance towards the opposition.

In recent months, thousands of National League for Democracy (NLD) members have been held by the government, and many

have resigned from the party on their release.

Hall said he handed over a list of political prisoners compiled by the NLD to the government which "is accused by foreign nations and human rights groups of serious and prolonged human rights abuses including torture, forced labour and imprisonment without trial."

The NLD last week said it would sue Khin Nyunt for "destroying" the party and intimidating its members into resigning. The party won a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the junta has refused to cede power.

Hall, who also held talks with Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, warned that as politicians squabbled in Yangon, people were suffering from malnutrition, water borne diseases and one of the worst AIDS problems in the world.

"There is an old saying in Burma (Myanmar) that 'when the water buffalo fight the rice dies,' which means when the political people fight, the people essentially get trampled and I think that's happening," he said.

He warned against political interference in aid work, saying that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were deterred from Myanmar fearing their independence could be compromised.

"Unfortunately many

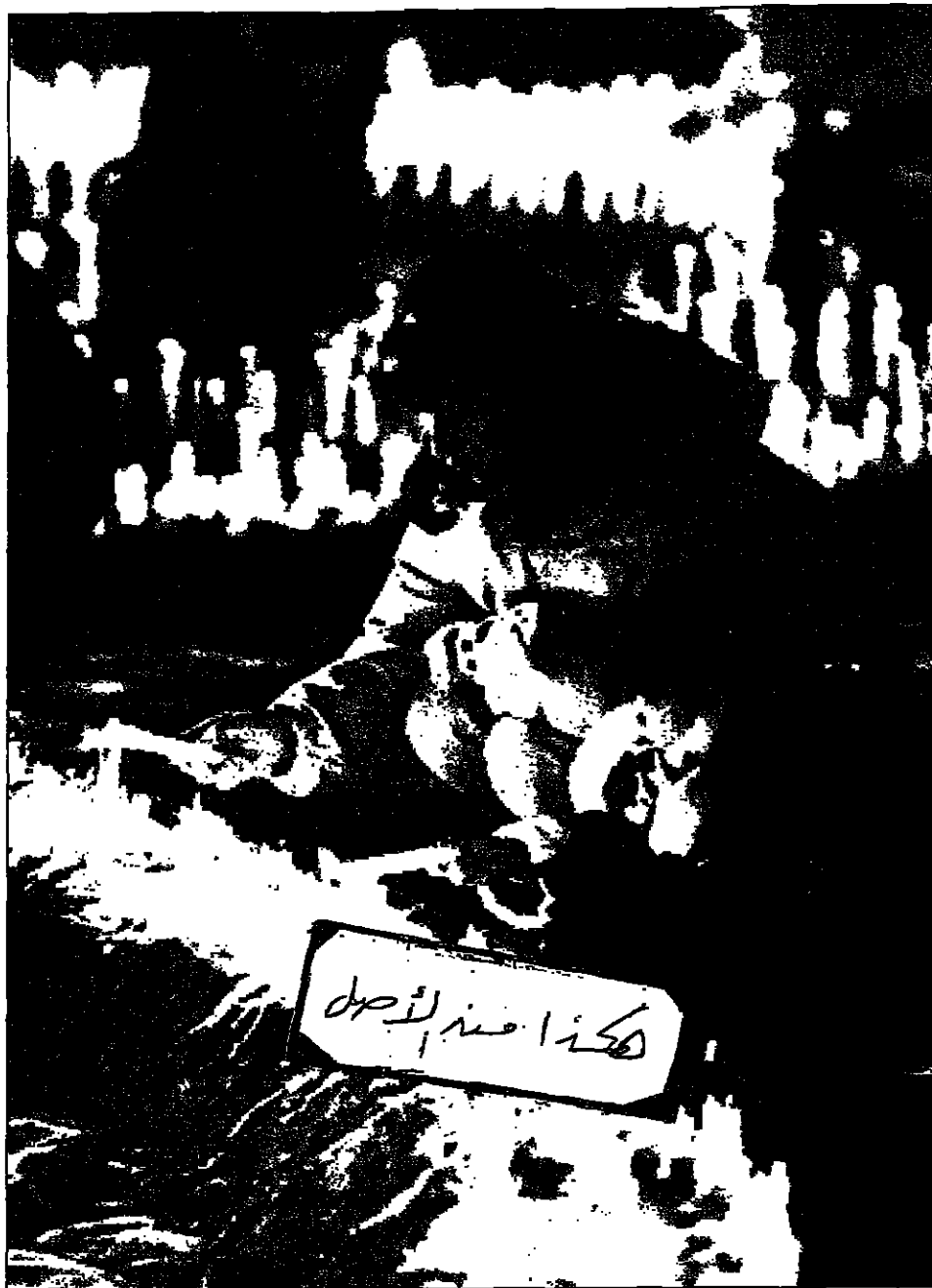
NGOs and government agencies see consultations with any political party, even one as legitimate as the NLD, as the start of a slippery slope and in a world of hurt there are so many other places NGOs can go to work," he said.

Hall rejected the idea that Aung San Suu Kyi should be given a veto on any disbursement of aid under a proposed U.N.-backed plan to reward political change in Myanmar starting with humanitarian assistance.

"I would not say that she should have veto power at all, because once you start to do that and you start to have a precedent then you are going to have problems in other countries and that precedent should not be started in Burma."

Some reports have suggested Aung San Suu Kyi would hold a veto to prevent the junta backing out of concessions made to win aid. While praising Aung San Suu Kyi as holding the "heart of many people in the country," Hall cautioned that foreign lobby groups should not forget humanitarian issues as they campaign for human rights.

"Burma is a noble cause, but it is also a country of 48 million people who need help, and I challenge the activists for human rights to work hard to meet people's humanitarian needs," said Hall, who also visited Laos during his trip.



Residents light candles to offer prayers for victims of the Kobe earthquake at Koya Pond Park near Kobe, western Japan, the eve of the fourth anniversary of the quake. The 1995 earthquake killed more than 6,400 people and left tens of thousands homeless (Reuters photo)

Kobe remembers killer quake as misery goes on for thousands

TOKYO (AFP) — The Japanese port of Kobe remembered Sunday the 6,430 people killed in a massive earthquake four years ago, as some 6,000 families continued to live in makeshift shelters.

Although its skyline has been restored with new high-rise buildings and giant port container cranes again dot the landscape, the city of 1.4 million people is now deeply split over a plan to build an offshore airport.

In a nationally-televised address at a memorial service, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi noted that the Kobe area was also hard hit by Japan's worst post-war recession "although reconstruction of main infrastructures and facilities has been completed."

The premier said it was an urgent task to find permanent housing for 5,841 families still living in temporary barracks.

The number has dropped sharply from the November 1995 peak of 46,617 families, but 1,200 still have nowhere to go when those small frame houses are closed in late March.

Hyogo prefecture, of which Kobe is the biggest city, has built public housing units for 34,500 families

and a further 7,500 will be completed soon.

"The government for its part will continue making efforts to help the area rehabilitate as soon as possible," Obuchi said.

The premier acknowledged the lack of "comprehensive anti-disaster measures," and pledged "all-out efforts to create a society people in which people can feel safe to live."

The government came under fire for being slow in sending in help when the killer quake, registering 7.2 on the Richter scale, crushed the industrial and commercial belt without warning.

Most of the dead were crushed to death in collapsed buildings or killed by fires — and some 44,000 people were injured, 8,800 of them seriously.

The cost of reconstruction was then estimated at \$77 billion (\$9 billion euros).

The nation's economic crisis has left 5.8 per cent of Hyogo's workforce jobless, higher than the national average, according to the Bank of Japan.

"As we go on, we want to cherish warm people-to-people contacts and live a strong and contented life to make up for the

regretful losses of my parents and more than 6,000 others."

Naotoshi Tatenuma, a 28-year-old survivor, told the memorial service.

But the unity of the people appears to be in jeopardy as the city is forging ahead with a nine-year-old plan to build an airport on a man-made island.

Kobe city hall has ignored some 310,000 signatures calling for a referendum on the \$27 billion project.

Critics say it poses environmental and financial hazards and could not compete with two existing airports in nearby Osaka.

The economic downturn has also led to a record 807 bankruptcies in the prefecture last year, according to a private credit research agency.

Before the quake, Kobe handled 30 per cent of Japan's international container traffic, with 30 foreign cargo ships docking there every day. Around 2.6 million containers passed through the port in 1994.

Last October, the handling volume was down about 10 per cent from the previous year and down some 30 per cent from the 1994 level.

U.S., North Korea resume talks on suspected nuclear site

GENEVA (AFP) — The United States and North Korea resumed talks here Sunday over Washington's demand to inspect an underground site it suspects is being used to revive the hardline communist state's nuclear weapons programme.

North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan, leading the talks for Pyongyang, said big differences remained between the two sides.

"Yesterday the U.S. and North Korean sides stuck to their original positions," he said.

The U.S. negotiating team, headed by special envoy for Korean affairs Charles Kartman, arrived at the North Korean mission at 10:15

a.m. (0915 GMT).

The two sides held more than six hours of talks Saturday at the U.S. mission.

The talks are aimed at saving a 1994 agreement under which North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programme in return for aid and the easing of Korean war-era sanctions.

North Korea, which says the site is for undisclosed civilian purposes and that to inspect it would be a violation of sovereignty, has demanded that Washington pay \$300 million to take a look.

Washington has rejected the demand and warned Pyongyang it must prove compliance with the 1994 Agreed Framework.

Under that accord, a U.S.-led consortium agreed to replace North Korea's risky graphite nuclear reactors — which produce weapons-grade plutonium — with safer light-water models.

The United States also agreed to supply 500,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil to North Korea annually to help with its energy needs until the reactors come on stream.

However, in August a U.S. spy satellite spotted activity at an underground complex at Kumchangri near Yongbyon, where North Korea's mothballed nuclear reactors are located. U.S. officials suspect the site could be used to produce plutonium for nuclear arms.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Chavez arrives in Cuba for summit on Colombian peace process

HAVANA (AFP) — Venezuelan president-elect Hugo Chavez will meet with the presidents of Cuba and Colombia here Sunday for informal talks on the Colombian peace process. Chavez arrived in Cuba Saturday, saying "I am the friend of Colombia." Both Chavez and Cuban President Fidel Castro have indicated they are prepared to facilitate peace talks between the Colombian government and leftist guerrillas. Negotiators for the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas have been meeting since Jan. 7 in a remote Colombian jungle town in an effort to end the bloody four-decade conflict that has claimed 120,000 lives. Pastrana, who is on a three-day official to the Communist island, is here to discuss what role Castro, who has agreed to be a moderator, will play. This is Chavez's second visit to Cuba. His first was in 1994, two years after he led a failed coup attempt in Venezuela. Venezuela shares a 2,000-kilometre border and \$2.5 billion yearly trade with Colombia.

Leaders of Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda expected at Congo summit

WINDHOEK (AFP) — The presidents of Zimbabwe, Uganda and Rwanda were expected here Sunday to attend a mini-summit on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a Namibian official said. However, the leaders of the DRC, Angola, Chad and Zambia, will not be at the meeting organised by Namibian President Sam Nujoma. The presidential official told AFP. Nujoma announced the mini-summit Friday, saying the intention was to convene the Kinshasa government and its allies — Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola and Chad — and DRC rebels who began an uprising last August, with their backers, Uganda and Rwanda. The Namibian foreign ministry said in a statement that "consultations among the core group of countries which are militarily involved in the war in the DRC" were expected to start at 3:30 p.m. (1430 GMT). Zambia, which has been mediating in peace talks, was due to have attended. The Windhoek gathering comes the day after a meeting in Lusaka of foreign and defence ministers from 15 African countries, who failed to finalise the terms of ceasefire to end the five-month-old war. The presidential official here said that DRC President Laurent Kabila and Chadian President Idriss Deby were "not invited" and presidents Frederick Chiluba of Zambia and Jose Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola had declined the invitation. This meant only Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Rwanda's President Pasteur Bizimungu were expected to come to Windhoek for the meeting.

Religious persecution harming U.S.-Laos ties, congressman says

VIENTIANE, Laos (AP) — Religious persecution remains a major hurdle preventing the United States from granting trade concessions to Laos, a U.S. congressman said Sunday. Tony P. Hall, a Democrat from Ohio, said he made this clear in meetings with top leaders of the Communist government during his three-day trip to the Southeast Asian nation. "It's a major stumbling block preventing the U.S. Congress from approving Most Favored Nation (MFN) status for Laos," he told reporters. Hall expressed displeasure with the detainment of eight Lao citizens who were imprisoned in February last year for worshipping at an unauthorised Christian service. Authorities initially arrested 44 persons at the service, but immediately deported three Americans in the group and released all but the eight Lao citizens in attendance. Hall said freeing the eight would send a "big signal to Congress" that Laos was willing to move on the issue of religious freedom. During his visit, which ended Sunday, Hall also travelled to southern Laos to inspect a crash site where remains of U.S. servicemen killed in action were found recently. He praised efforts by the Lao government to help resolve the fates of more than 400 servicemen missing in action (MIAs) in Laos, describing it as central to America's "greatly improved" ties with the small, landlocked nation over the past four years. Most of the MIAs were pilots who carried out one of the most intensive bombing campaigns in history as they tried to prevent North Vietnamese soldiers and supplies from reaching South Vietnam through Laos.

Chinese company adopts name 'Viagra' for its pill

BEIJING (R) — A Chinese company plans to capitalise on the international success of Viagra this month when it markets its own anti-impotence drug — under the same name. Aonong Feilong (Hong Kong) Group plans to begin selling its self-developed treatment "Weige Kaitai" on Jan. 25 in the northeastern city of Shenyang, the China Daily said Sunday. "Weige," literally meaning "great man," is the familiar Chinese translation for Viagra. Viagra, the diamond-shaped blue pill manufactured by U.S. drug firm Pfizer Inc., has not been legally approved yet for sale in China, but already has earned a reputation through local media as a miracle cure for erectile dysfunction. "Viagra ranked alongside 'Titanic' as the best-known new English word in China last year," the China Daily said. Nearly 600 Chinese men are taking Viagra in clinical trials as health authorities evaluate the drug for import. The government has said it would announce a decision before the end of the year. In the meantime, the Chinese drug maker has a head-start on tapping the country's vast market of sexually frustrated men. "The existence of the Weige Kaitai pill will certainly influence the sales of Viagra in China if it is approved for import," the article quoted an official with the Trademark Office as saying. Jiang Wei, the Chinese drug's inventor and general manager of the Feilong Group, said he did not know of any challenges to his registration of the Weige Kaitai trademark, according to the article. His pill would sell at \$1.45 each, while "real" Viagra is available on China's blackmarket for as much as \$48, the newspaper said.

Farmer executed in China for Buddha statue theft

BEIJING (R) — A farmer was executed in China Friday for stealing a priceless statue of Buddha two years ago. Xinhua news agency reported. In a report late Saturday, Xinhua said Gao Yunliao was executed in the central province of Henan. He and three accomplices were alleged to have prised the one-tonne statue from its stand in the famous Longmen Grottoes in March 1997. The report said the figure was broken into three pieces as Gao and his partners loaded it on to a truck before they buried it at the farmer's home. Gao's accomplices received prison sentences, it said, adding that the statue had been restored and was back on display. At least 1,876 people were executed in China in 1997, more than the rest of the world combined, according to the human rights watchdog Amnesty International. Death sentences are usually carried out with a single bullet to the head, although lethal injection was being introduced. The Longmen Grottoes are filled with thousands of images of Buddha and his disciples were carved in cliff walls between the 5th and 7th centuries.

Tamil leader ends self-imposed exile in India

COLOMBO (AFP) — A Sri Lankan Tamil leader who fled to India after issuing an ultimatum to the government here demanding greater autonomy has returned home ending his self-imposed exile, Tamil sources here said Sunday.

A. Varadaraja Perumal, the chief minister of the north-eastern provincial council, received protection from India which backed his council that was eventually sacked by then Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa.

Perumal had warned he would unilaterally declare independence in the island's north-east within a year unless the government granted promised powers to the semi-autonomous regional administration.

With the withdrawal in

March 1990 of Indian troops deployed in Sri Lanka's north-east in line with a bilateral peace pact of 1987, Perumal's leftist Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) was also driven out.

The EPRLF is opposed to Sri Lanka's dominant Tamil separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The EPRLF is a mainstream political party after having given up separatist demands but currently has no representation in parliament.

Indian authorities who had also backed the EPRLF together with several other Tamil political parties which supported the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka accord, provided tight security to Perumal Ajmir in India's Madhya Pradesh state.

Tamil sources said it was not immediately clear why Perumal had decided to end his exile. However, the move came within three weeks of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's state visit to India.

Kumaratunga's slain husband had been a keen ally of the EPRLF which until 1987 was fighting Sri Lankan government forces demanding a separate Tamil state. Later, the EPRLF settled for regional autonomy.

Tamil politicians here also speculated on the possibility of Perumal accepting an high profile job within the government but there was no official word either from the administration or from his party about the former chief minister's plans or whereabouts.



Experts inspect the trunk of a car that exploded in front of the U.S. embassy in Moscow. A small explosion slightly damaged the car and a police sentry box outside the U.S. embassy Sunday but police said no one was hurt and that it was probably caused by a technical fault in the vehicle (Reuters photo)

Car parked near U.S. embassy explodes

MOSCOW (AP) — An apparent fuel leak caused an explosion inside a car parked next to the U.S. embassy Sunday morning, but there were no reports of injuries or damage to the embassy building.

A spokesman for the Federal Security Service said the explosion was an accident, and not a bomb or a terrorist act.

The explosion occurred in the trunk of the car parked on the corner of a side street off the Garden

Ring Road, where the embassy is located.

According to the Interfax news agency, a propane gas canister in the car exploded. The ITAR-TASS news agency said a fuel leak caused the blast.

As a precaution, embassy security officials examined the undersides of other cars parked near the building, but no explosives were found.

The back window of the car, a white Zhiguli, was blown out, but there was

no apparent damage to the embassy building. The blast broke several windows in an adjacent apartment building.

Interfax said the car belonged to a Russian police officer assigned to guard the embassy.

Embassy spokesman Michael Hurley said workers inside the embassy had heard a "loud bang" outside. He said no one inside was injured.

Anti-American senti-

ments have been growing in Russia following the bombing raids on Iraq and the imposition of sanctions on Russian institutes for allegedly helping Iran to build weapons of mass destruction.

In 1995, the embassy was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade fired from across the street. The grenade pierced the wall of the building and exploded in an empty office. No one was injured in the attack.

Massacre of Kosovo Albanians shocks, calls for response

RACAK, Yugoslavia (AP) — In a hail of machine gun and mortar fire, Serb forces moved Sunday into this Kosovo village where 45 ethnic Albanians were massacred, sending terrified civilians and international monitors fleeing to safety.

Elsewhere, world leaders voiced outrage over the massacre and considered urgent responses to the slaughter, which the American head of the Kosovo peace verifiers called a crime against humanity.

Overnight, the bodies of 40 of the victims were brought to the village mosque. The bodies, covered by plastic sheets, lay on the stone floor on the mosque Sunday as family members sobbed and wailed "my brother," "my father," and "Oh, God." Villagers said they wanted to bury the bodies quickly, as is the Muslim custom, but feared Serb forces, deployed on a hill above the village, might fire on the mourners.

At midday, gunfire and explosions echoed through the hills, and monitors from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said the Serbs were moving on the village.

Panicked civilians fled down the road leading towards the nearby town of Stimlje. Nervous OSCE verifiers cursed journalists as they demanded reporters clear the road to allow monitors and villagers to escape.

In Belgrade, Serb President Milan Milutinovic repeated police claims that the ethnic Albanians were rebels killed in combat, although the dead included three women, a 12-year-old boy and old men. Some of the bodies were mutilated, and eyes were gouged out.

Milutinovic accused the head of the international monitoring mission, U.S. diplomat William Walker, of making "false and personal assessments which are totally baseless." Walker had blamed government forces for the massacre, which he called a "crime very much against humanity."

International monitors and journalists came across the carnage Saturday morning in Racak, 25 kilometres south of the provincial capital, Pristina, after having been barred from the site by Serbian police the previous day.

The bodies, found shot or mutilated, were heaped together in a muddy ravine.

The rebel Kosovo Liberation Army said the death toll from the massacre was 51, including nine of its fighters and a 3-month-old baby. The report could not be confirmed. Monitors put the death toll at 45.

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said ambassadors from the 16 NATO countries would meet Sunday in Brussels "in light of this outrageous situation."

Early Sunday, an estimated two dozen Serb police were seen heading for Racak, where KLA rebels were deployed. Sources in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the Serbs insisted on carrying out their own investigation of the massacre.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said OSCE told the Serbs they could conduct the investigation in a "non-threatening manner." But the presence of police and investigators raised fears of another confrontation.

In Washington, Rubin pointed out that NATO in October developed contingency plans for dealing with Kosovo, the Serbian province where ethnic Albanian separatists have been fighting with Serb police and troops. The plan includes the possible bombing of Serb installations.

"There should be no doubt of NATO's resolve," Rubin said.

Elsewhere, the massacre drew a sharp response. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged a swift investigation.

Albania called for an urgent meeting of the U.N. Security Council after the "inhuman massacre."

The U.N.'s Yugoslav war crimes tribunal opened an investigation, and chief prosecutor Louise Arbour was preparing to go to Kosovo with or without permission from Yugoslav authorities.

"This was a deliberate and indiscriminate act of murder designed to sow fear among the people of Kosovo," said President Clinton, condemning the atrocity and calling it "a clear violation" of the Serbs' cease-fire agreement.

The grisly discovery by international monitors included the bodies of three women, a 12-year-old and many older men, all in civilian clothes. The killings present the gravest threat yet of a return to full-scale combat in the separatist province.

Some of the dead had their eyes gouged out or heads smashed in, and one man lay decapitated in the courtyard of his compound.

Many had been shot at close range, and residents of Racak village said Serb forces had rounded up the men, driven them up the hill and shot them. Twenty-eight bodies lay heaped together at the bottom of a muddy hillside gully.

Visibly upset and his voice shaking after visiting

the killing site, Walker called the massacre "an unspeakable atrocity," and "a crime very much against humanity."

"Nor do I hesitate to accuse the government security forces of responsibility," Walker said, urging prosecutors from the International War Crimes Tribunal to come investigate.

Yugoslav authorities agreed to end their crackdown against ethnic Albanians in the separatist Serbian province under the threat of NATO airstrikes last October.

The alliance's top official, Secretary-General Javier Solana, warned that NATO "will not tolerate a return to all-out fighting and a policy of repression in Kosovo."

Police, who were backed by Yugoslav army tanks in Friday's assault on Racak and neighbouring Petrovo, said they had killed "tens of terrorists" in the action. They said they fought back after coming under mortar and automatic weapons fire while trying to arrest guerrilla suspects for the murder of a policeman.

But villagers said Serb police had separated men from their families and led them up the hill, where they killed them.

Bodies lay where they apparently were slain, along cow paths and in deep, hilly ravines.

The KLA's political representative, Adem Demaci, called on all Kosovo Albanians to rally behind the KLA.

Prosecutor starts Kosovo mission

AMSTERDAM (R) — United Nations chief war crimes prosecutor Louise Arbour Monday begins investigating the alleged slaughter of 45 ethnic Albanians by Yugoslav security forces, a spokesman said Sunday.

Arbour, heading a seven person team, expects to arrive in Skopje, the capital of Yugoslav republic Macedonia, at around noon Monday.

The team, which includes four investigators, will be met by representatives of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the 54-nation monitoring body.

International monitors have accused Yugoslav forces of murdering dozens of villagers in the south of the province, where ethnic Albanians outnumber Serbs by nine to one.

The OSCE said U.S. diplomatic observers had counted 45 corpses.

The war crimes prosecutor announced Saturday she would be leading a mission to Kosovo and was demanding immediate access to the areas. The Yugoslav government has blocked previous attempts to

secure visas that would allow U.N. investigators into Kosovo.

Yugoslavia disputes the claim by the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia that it has jurisdiction over the province of Kosovo. Pressure from the U.N. Security Council has so far done nothing to alter that stance.

In a statement Saturday, Arbour said the massacre fell "squarely within the mandate" of the war crimes tribunal, adding Yugoslavia was required to grant access.

"As far as we are concerned, we have rounded the circle. We have said she is coming, so they can't be surprised," spokesman Christian Chatter told Reuters Sunday.

The Hague-based International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia was established by the U.N. Security Council in May, 1993 with the brief to bring to justice those guilty of war crimes in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991.

To date, it has only issued public indictments linked to the war that accompanied the break-up of the former Yugoslavia.

More Russians apply for Latvian citizenship, but problems remain

RIGA (AFP) — Ethnic Russians have rushed to seek naturalisation since Latvia eased its tough citizenship law late last year, but the Baltic state is still experiencing problems integrating minorities, experts warn.

Naturalisation bureau officials say applications have tripled since a hotly contested referendum last autumn made it easier to acquire Latvian nationality.

Voters agreed to remove all age and birthplace restrictions that had effectively excluded nearly a third of Latvia's 2.4 million residents from gaining citizenship.

"Yes there has been a jump in applications," said Nils Muiznieks of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, "but my impression is that it probably won't last that long."

Naturalisation applications averaged about 300 a month before the amendments came into force last November, officials said, and then surged to more than 1,000 a month in November and December.

Even more people scheduled appointments to hand in their applications to avoid standing in long lines, the

naturalisation bureau added. However, officials estimate it will likely take 13 years to process the 325,000 people it expects to apply for citizenship.

And survey data show that poor Latvian language skills will likely deter more than half of the 650,000 "non-citizens" from taking the naturalisation exam, Muiznieks noted.

Many young men will opt against citizenship to avoid serving in the army, and others who visit relatives often may not want to lose visa-free travel with Russia.

Significantly, many feel that Latvians have not done enough to make minorities feel welcome.

"The main problem is not the provisions of the law but the general attitude of the government, political parties and general public opinion," said Boris Tsilevich, a human rights campaigner elected to parliament last fall.

"Non-citizens are told all the time: You are not welcome here. You are aliens. It is better if you leave."

After Latvia regained independence in 1991 it barred those who arrived during the 50-year Soviet

occupation and their descendants from applying for citizenship, embittering the ethnic-Russian minority and souring relations with Moscow.

Russia imposed limited economic sanctions on Latvia last year over Riga's alleged mistreatment of ethnic Russians, and still refuses to sign a border treaty seven years after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Although there is almost no outright violence between the two communities — on the contrary there is a considerable amount of intermarriage — resentment remains high among many Russians, including those now seeking citizenship.

"I admit it is something of a vendetta to seek citizenship so I can vote against those who didn't want me to be able to vote in the first place," said one Russian-speaker when asked why he wanted Latvian nationality.

Analysts say a surge in the number of ethnic-Russians taking citizenship could tip the balance of power in parliament towards the left, fuelling fears that right-wing forces in the government might try to slow down the naturalisation process.

A nationalist party in the government has delayed granting citizenship to non-citizens' children born in Latvia since 1991, one of the key measures approved in the referendum.

It has blocked adoption of regulations to implement the measure, citing forged concerns to object to the use of several legally valid identification documents to prove residency.

The government's next steps are likely to be crucial in deciding whether the flicker of goodwill engendered by the referendum's positive results can be translated into genuine progress in integration.

The parliament's debate of a controversial language law, which would restrict the use of Russian in private business, and educational reforms which will likely spark a sharp fall in Russian-language classes in schools, could poison the atmosphere.

The government is also long overdue to release a social integration plan. Muiznieks warned that if the government failed to ensure an inclusive debate about the plan it could end up doing more harm than good.

China will tolerate differences with Taiwan

SINGAPORE (AFP) — China will tolerate differences in Taiwan, and even allow it to maintain its own army, once it accepts the mainland's principle of "one country, two systems," Singapore's Sunday Times reported.

Lian Xisheng, a member of a visiting six-member panel from the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), said differences in legal structure and social systems between China and Taiwan

can be resolved through this principle.

"We are prepared to be more flexible even in allowing Taiwan to retain its own military, something that Hong Kong and Macau do not have," Lian told local reporters Saturday.

"In fact, under 'two systems,' Taiwan will have much of the freedom they are enjoying or have been craving for," including international recognition and democratic reform.

he said.

Zhang Mingqing, head of the ARATS delegation to Singapore, said Beijing hardly objected to Taiwan wishing to maintain its democracy or identifying its people as new Taiwanese.

Once reunification is completed, "China will proceed with its socialism path using Chinese characteristics, while Taiwan can carry on with what the Taiwanese wanted," Zhang also told local reporters Saturday.

"Neither side would swallow the other up," he said.

But Zhang said Beijing would oppose any political change that diverts from reunification of China and Taiwan under the "one country, two systems" rule.

Chinese nationalists fled the mainland for Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war to the communists. Beijing regards Taiwan as a renegade province.

Mahathir to discuss general elections after Eid celebrations

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's ruling coalition will meet after the Eid al-Fitr celebration in Malaysia to discuss preparations for general elections as party insiders said Sunday early polls could be just weeks away.

Coalition secretary-general Mohamed Rahmat called on coalition parties to rally support to build a strong front and urged elected representatives to listen to the people's views.

He did not indicate when elections would be held, saying it was up to Mahathir to decide. But he advised the coalition parties to prepare their election machinery now.

"Even though Barisan

(National Front coalition) is strong and does not face any problem in winning the election, we cannot afford to be complacent and rest on our laurels," Mohamed was quoted as saying by The Sunday Star newspaper.

"The meeting is the first step towards the announcement of the general election. Mahathir must know the feelings of the other communities before an election date is fixed," a senior member of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) said.

The party insider said there was a growing possibility the 73-year-old bility he came to Mahathir, who came to power in 1981, may relinquish his post after the vote.

"He has been around for sometime. It can happen after the elections," he said.

"The possibility of the general elections after the Chinese New Year cannot be ruled out," the UMNO insider said. Lunar New Year falls on Feb. 16, while the Eid al-Fitr celebrations ending the Muslim holy month of Ramadan fall early this week in Malaysia.

Observers said the election battle cry would centre on the economic crisis and the saga of former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar, 51, was sacked in September amid bitter policy differences with Mahathir and arrested under internal security laws after leading protests against his former mentor.

He was later charged with 10 counts of corruption and sexual misconduct all of which he has denied.

Analysts have said Mahathir, who is also president of UMNO, is unlikely to risk letting his government complete its term as scheduled in April 2000, given the uncertainties clouding the economy and the region.

Now could be a good time to go to the country.

"It is calm in UMNO. Now is the time to find out the sentiments of the other major races like the Chinese and Indians," he added.


UMNO is the dominant party in the National Front coalition which champions the interest of the country's

Muslims, who represent about 54 per cent of the 22 million population.

Mahfuz Omar, youth chief of the Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS) said it is high time Mahathir tested the mandate of the people following the economic crisis and injustices in the country.


"The people have lost confidence in the National Front coalition," Mahfuz said, adding: "We are confident the people will vote for the opposition."

Mahathir met political leaders of the eastern state of Sabah Saturday to decide on a possible election date. The state government's five-year term ends on March 18 and polls must be called within 60 days.



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Timely review

IN HIS address to the nation Saturday from London, His Majesty King Hussein said that he would soon launch a comprehensive review of the nation's progress and address all issues and challenges before it. Such a review is most timely as the Kingdom has in the past six months cleared some major hurdles and began on a path of reform. Although His Majesty was physically absent from the Kingdom during this period, his selfless determination to not only reassure his people through the most difficult battle of his life but to keep abreast of every detail on the home front through constant contact with HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, has set in motion the process of reform that both have worked so long for.

The areas of reform seen as most urgent remain the same. The democratic process begun in 1989 has suffered the growing pains expected of such a process in a country of such a diverse demography as Jordan. Today, that process needs strengthening through the improvement of the Elections Law, the building of civil society and its organisations, and the liberalisation of the media.

The lessons learned from the recent years of applying an economic adjustment programme point to necessary reforms to help lower the deficit and reduce state expenditure. Measures towards such reforms will no doubt be severe, but a comprehensive plan to implement the necessary measures and soothe the discomfort or pain that will have to be borne is not impossible.

The continuous calls to improve education, particularly as Jordan enters the new Millennium, must be backed by added spending on education and research.

Finally, the desire to stomp out corruption requires an airtight system of checks and balances that will not only prevent and treat this debilitating problem, but also work to instill a sense of responsibility and patriotism in the country's people that encourages good citizenship at home, in the community and at work.

Each of these areas of reform has been under scrutiny. The practice of introducing comprehensive dialogue with all the sectors of the Jordanian society has helped to better reveal the genuine problems facing the nation. At the same time it has fostered a new sense of responsibility in the sectoral leaders involved in the dialogue. The path set can only lead to achievement with His Majesty's planned extensive review of the state of the nation.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Arab Al Yawm's Hassan Nablisi outlined a few points he thought the Drought Committee ought to consider. Agricultural subsidies are given all over the world, thus, said the writer, there is no need to hide behind the International Monetary Fund, which caused the problem in the first place. The price of fodder is high, while the oat in general is of low quality; is there any quality standards that the country should rely on in exporting such items, asked the writer. Similarly, the prices of barley and grain are high compared to international prices. According to Nablisi, policies, decisions and regulations are more important than subsidies because they affect the procedures of imports and exports as well as specifications and quality, added the writer. Nablisi urged all concerned parties to form a farmers' general union as soon as possible, that could handle current and coming agricultural situations, and set up a long-term plan to cope with "dangerous and worrisome" problems.

Al Dustour's Mazen Saket said the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) meeting on the Iraq crisis ended in two conflicting decisions, which indicates that there are sharp differences in official stands. The council decided to try to lift the sanctions against Iraq in line with international legitimacy as well as U.N. resolutions, and to refuse to attend this month's Arab foreign ministers' meeting. It is obvious, that this was a victory for the Gulf states, who are still objecting to a unified Arab stand against the embargo and are insisting on sticking to their differences with Iraq's regime, said Saket. The call to lift the sanctions in line with international legitimacy means practically keeping them imposed, especially since such legitimacy is currently blocked by the U.S., said the writer. The significant outcome of the GCC meeting is the decision not to attend the ministers' meeting because it means there will be no unified Arab stand, said Saket, and it puts the council at loggerheads with the Arab League which could be "dangerous." The writer said the Gulf states that do not agree with the council's decisions should participate in the coming meeting in order to prevent further Arab divisions.

An economist's wish list

Economic Review



Dr. Yusuf Mansur

AS A STUDENT of the Jordanian economy, I was called upon by the editor of this page to write this week's article about things that ought to be done to improve the economy. Even though I knew fully well that compliance would ensure that at least one person (the editor) would read the article, something which is heart warming to most writers particularly yours truly, I still hesitated. Why? The wish list of things to do — on the economic front that is — is massive and any detail of its items would require volumes, not just a single column. Nevertheless, here it is: an economist's way too abbreviated wish list.

Working from the premise that Jordan is a somewhat open market economy, three main components are to be addressed: consumer demand, supply of production factors (land, labour capital) and the institutional component, which affects the interplay of the whole gamut of the market. How can one affect these components to improve the income of labour and capital? I'll address each component separately.

Consumer demand: Spending by Jordanians (government, households and investors) should become increasingly sophisticated to buy more of the better goods and services. To improve the quality and quantity of demand, policies affecting both the microeconomy (the economic unit such as household, factory or product or a specific production factor market) and the

macro view (the aggregate economy) must come into play.

To improve the quality of consumer demand, information about product safety and standards must be institutionalised with the adoption of such standards becoming a necessity. Consumers have to learn to demand the best and be able to purchase it. This can be achieved through public-private partnerships, enhanced information systems, civic society mobilisation, opening the market by reducing tariffs and other trade barriers, state-of-the-art calibration and testing systems, quality awareness campaigns, available testing for safety, and consumer protection legislation.

To improve aggregate demand the usual fiscal policies must apply, which include reducing taxes or increasing government spending or both without enlarging the government, which is not easy to accomplish. That is why many economists, monetarists, neo-classicals and supply siders advocate a passive role for government. However, they assume the absence of government interference from the start, which can hardly be true in the case of Jordan where government was, is, and continues to be the only thriving business in town. Also, the adoption of increased government spending means increased borrowing and indebtedness beyond the present level. But debt must be paid back with interest, assuming that lenders refuse to reschedule or forgive. Therefore, borrowing must be

against a transparent well-publicised debt ceiling and for well-studied projects that aim directly at enhancing productivity in the short and medium terms. The rate of return on investment must be greater than the interest; otherwise the debt of today will be wasted and grow to become a legacy of hardship and poverty for tomorrow's generation.

Production factors: Production factors need to be improved through quality and quantity enhancement measures. For example increasing labour by maintaining the birth rate at its present level may raise the GDP but simultaneously cause the per capita income to fall if the growth rate does not match that of the population. The trick is to increase the productivity of the worker through specialisation and training. Skilled labour is more productive than non-skilled labour and therefore a large, skilled workforce is better than a small one because both the GDP and the per capita GDP rise — the first enhancing the economy size of the nation and the second enhancing the welfare of its citizens. Furthermore, a highly skilled workforce demands high wages and is thus able to pay for high quality products to sustain a sophisticated demand.

The same quality and quantity improvement argument applies to the capital (machinery, tools and factories) and land (land surface and natural resources such as water, minerals, etc.) of the nation. Better still, their utilisation must be

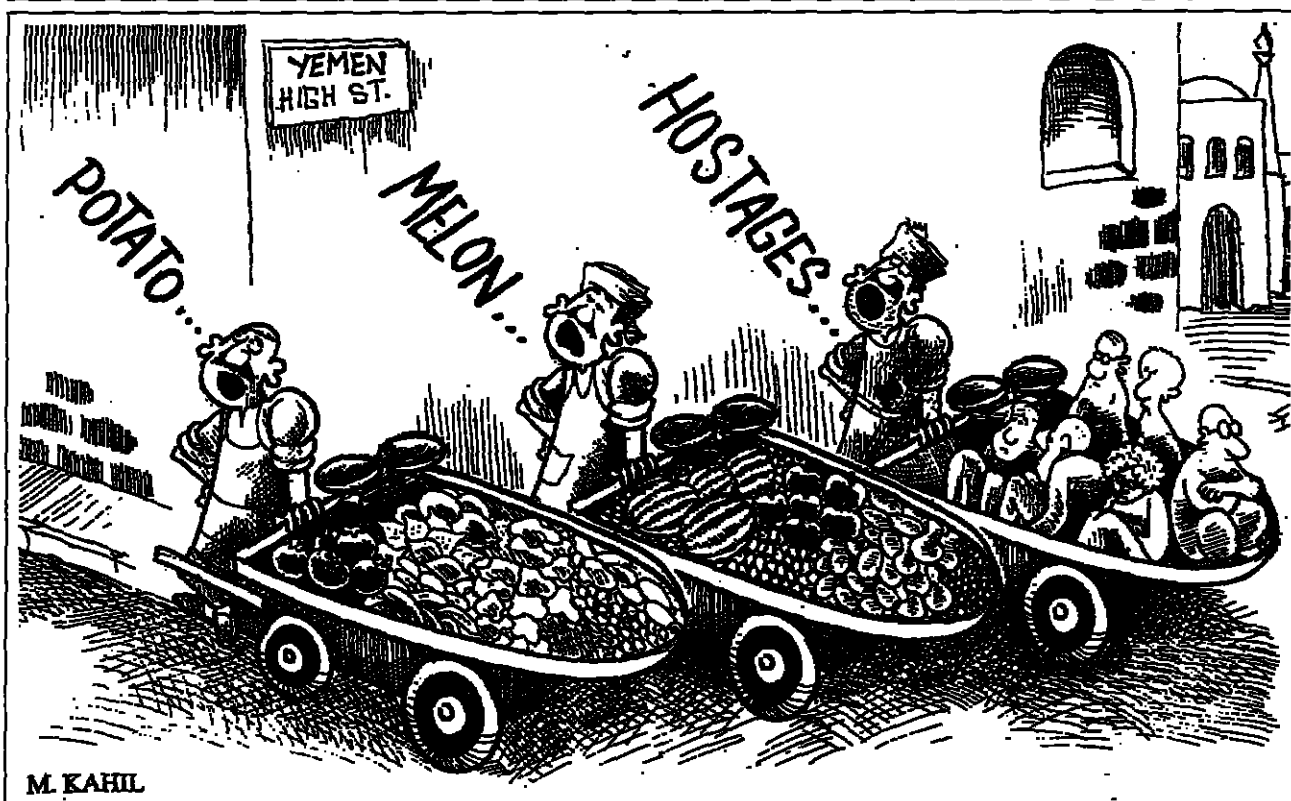
improved to produce better quality downstream products that have high value added, otherwise resources scarce or not are wasted, which is presently the case in many of our industries.

Institutionalisation: The institutional component of my list includes the government and civic society. The government must provide a stable, modern and transparent legislative environment, and continue the structural and economic reform programme it has started. Modern transparent legislation can only work when combined with a relatively small public sector. To shrink and streamline the public sector there must be privatisation to finance the training and transfer of public sector employees to the private sector without unnecessary social distress and upheaval. However, privatisation is a policy that requires a long period of time to implement, which means that the

government must be stable and serve far longer than the average cabinets presently do. Otherwise, as cabinets change privatisation schemes lose their champions. Furthermore, the government must introduce antitrust laws to break the backbone of monopolistic anti-competitive practices. Simultaneously, anti-nepotism legislation must be introduced to curb the growth of tribal relations in the work place — such relations were only important in the days of nomadic lawlessness and should never thrive in an efficient democracy of laws and institutions. Also, information systems must improve to provide detailed information about the different industries in the country to investors, foreign and domestic.

However, information should be organised around clusters (groups of firms and entities that contribute toward the production of a good or a service) and not around sectors which usually become rigid and never provide a clear picture of the industry.

Well, this is my wish list. For all of it to work, expectations must become positive again, reminiscent of the spirit of 1994 and 1995 when dreams were alive and well. At any rate, Jordan has a great start this year with the safe return of His Majesty the King; may all those great feelings of cheer that are stirred in us continue throughout the year and manifest themselves into "what can I do to make Jordan better?"



M. KAHIL

The ABCs of academics

Don't know your ACTS from your A-LEVELS? Don't worry, help is at hand in the form of this 'mini-dictionary' guide for confused parents and students to the bewildering world of academic abbreviations. Part two will be published tomorrow

By James L. Gillespie

ACT The American College Testing Assessment is one of the two basic examinations used by American colleges and universities as an entrance examination. It is less widely used than its rival, SAT I, but some universities require it. Other universities may give the student the option of taking ACT or SAT I. A few universities such as Duke and Boston College accept the ACT in the place of SAT II. The ACT is a multiple-choice examination that covers four areas: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. It is somewhat more content oriented than SAT I which focuses on logic and problem solving skills. For details contact AmidEast.

AICE The advanced International Certificate of Education is a new Secondary School Certificate programme that is offered by UCLES, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. It is designed to provide a coordinated curriculum for the years that follow the completion of the IGCSE programme (18+). AICE is designed as an international curriculum, but is based in British education. Students must complete five 200 classroom-hour courses in three different academic areas and pass the UCLES examinations based upon those courses to receive the certificate. The Ministry of Education recognises AICE as an equivalent to Tawjihi. Details on the programme are available through the British Council.

'A'-Level Advanced-Level study in selected subjects undertaken after the completion of IGCSE or GCE studies (18+). At the conclusion of their studies students must pass an examination in each subject selected for study. British universities normally expect students to present two or three 'A'-Levels, usually with a minimum grade of 'C' in addition to six IGCSE or GCE 'O'-Levels for admission. The AICE programme is the latest option in 'A'-Level studies. For details contact the British Council.

AP The Advanced Placement Examinations are 3-hour examinations in

specific subject areas taken by secondary school students who hope to receive university credit in the selected subject areas. The format of AP examinations differs from subject to subject. A large number of U.S. colleges and universities award university course credit for successful completion of AP examinations. AP exams are developed to test what a first-year university student should know about the selected subject. The AP Diploma is a secondary school curriculum devised by ETS to serve the needs of international students. Like AICE and IB, the AP Diploma requires students to undertake a coordinated programme of study and to pass AP examinations in specific content areas to receive the diploma. The Ministry of Education does not recognise the AP Diploma at this point. The ministry has devised its own Tawjihi equivalence certificate based upon SAT II. For details contact AmidEast.

CAT Computer Adopted Tests are now employed for TOEFL, GMAT and GRE. These examinations are now administered by computer. These tests are custom designed for each student. As the student answers questions, the computer selects the next questions based upon the demonstrated ability level of the test-taker. As the student masters more difficult questions, his/her score increases. Since computer space is limited, students need to register well in advance of the date on which they will take a CAT examination.

CPE The Cambridge Proficiency in English is a 5-hour examination of writing, grammar, vocabulary, and reading designed to demonstrate the ability of a student to undertake university work in an English-language university. The examination is developed by UCLES. For details contact the British Council.

ETS Educational Testing Service, also known as The College Board, is the designer and administrator of the majority of American university tests including TOEFL, SAT AP GRE and GMAT. FAFSA The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a form that is used to determine an American university student's eli-

gibility for government financial assistance. Since the form presents a picture of the student's family's financial circumstances, some American universities will ask international applicants to complete the form. The university will then use the FAFSA to determine if that student is eligible for financial aid from the university. FCE First Certificate in English is a Cambridge (UCLES) examination similar to the CPE but at a less advanced level. GCE The General Certificate of Education is a British Programme of early secondary education (16+) based upon subject examinations administered by the University of London. These examinations are offered at 'O'-Level [GCSE] and at 'A'-Level. GCE 'O'-Levels are less common in Britain than GCSE 'O'-Levels.

GCSE The General Certificate of Secondary Education is described under GCE. GPA Grade Point Average is a numerical average of a student's marks. It can be expressed as a percentage figure. Thus, a student who received a 90, an 85, an 80, and a 70 in four courses would have a GPA of 81.25. In the U.S., letter-grades are the normal notation system. To compute GPA count an 'A' Grade as 4, a 'B' as 3, a 'C' as 2, a 'D' as 1, and an 'F' as 0. Thus a student who receives an 'A', a 'B', and two 'C' grades in four courses would have a GPA of 2.75. University application forms often request the applicant's secondary school GPA.

The writer is the Chairman of the Academic Committee of The American University of the Middle East. He is an examiner for AP and IB, and also serves as a consultant to The Modern American School and The Sweis Educational Centre.

For further information contact:

For U.S. based tests:
AmidEast — 586-2950
British based tests:
The British Council — 463-61478

LETTERS

Best wishes

To His Majesty:

EACH WORD written and spoken about you, to welcome you back in our midst, is an understatement, compared to the love we feel for you.

We thank our Lord, for restoring your health, and bringing you safely back home. My sincere wish is, that we all in this part of the world, learn the true meaning of love, patience and endurance from you, especially our children, and theirs in turn, to make our world a better place to live in. Your sincerity and openness in world dealings, has put you, us, and our country, in front of the eyes of the world. May God grant you many more years of health and happiness with us. Your Majesty — may we stand up to your expectations.

Dr. Barbara Burgan
Amman

Fears for foreign workers

To the editor:

I HAVE been here for about ten years, and I recall the Royal amnesty granted by His Majesty King Hussein after his triumphant return from successful surgery in 1992. Once again, thank God, His Majesty has successfully recovered from illness and I am one of those eagerly awaiting his return.

Again there is talk of an "amnesty" for "illegal" foreign guest workers. If Mr. Calano's observations concerning the Jordanian Labour Law of 1996 are correct (Letters, J.T., Dec. 29, 1998), then not only foreign guest workers but their Jordanian host employers have reason to be happy and to thank the magnanimity of His Majesty.

Is it true that, based on Mr. Calano's observations, an amnesty would mean not only pardoning the wilful neglect of employers not paying for the work permit fees of their guest workers, thus making the latter illegal or undocumented workers, but also waiving the so-called JD50 monthly penalty which per computation (for 800,000 illegal foreign workers) would yield about JD800 million in revenue to the National Treasury?

What happens then to the foreign workers concerned? I am sure a great majority of them could identify the Jordanian employers they have been working for without work permits. As in 1992, we hope and pray that since they find themselves in a situation not out of their own making, something can be done for their welfare. If they have to go, they have to go, but then please help them locate their employers who should pay for their return tickets to their countries of origin.

Victor Tamares
Amman

Demons are alive and well

To the editor:

I READ the opinion piece "And you thought demons were dead" (J.T., January 15) with much interest and related it directly to the type of news coverage the United States gets concerning what President Clinton has done. What is never talked about is the law that he has broken; it is said to "just be about sex." Also, the reported polls the media speak of daily don't represent my area nor that of friends and relatives in other states. Yes, indeed, I think we can truly say that the demons are alive and well! Thanks for a good editorial.

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The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.

Strengthening the relationship between Islam and the West

By Derek Fatchett

AS RAMADAN draws to a close, and the festivities of the 'Eid Al Fitr begin, I want to take a moment to reflect on the state of relations between Islam and the West.

It is a question of immense urgency and importance. If we are to prosper and grow together in a peaceful and diverse world, then we must understand each other better.

If we do not, the price will be high. Suspicion and stereotype feed upon themselves. The absence of trust can quickly turn into hostility or even outright conflict. Some people think that conflict between Islam and the West is inevitable. One of our key priorities is to prove them wrong.

The first step must be to fight the misconceptions and prejudice. We need to show the people of the West that Islam is not about extremism or terrorism who abuse its name. Far from being something to be afraid of — it is a tradition of great beauty and wisdom. We owe much to Islam. Islamic art, science and philosophy have enriched our lives in a multitude of ways. From the numerals we use to count to the systems of algebra and astronomy we use to understand our world, much of who we are and how we think is rooted in Islamic learning. Even the university system that became the powerhouse for intellectual progress in the Western world was modelled on the Islamic centres of learning that were beacons of enlightenment for the whole world.

And as the West searches for alternatives to the unbridled materialism that threatens the very future of our planet, we need to learn from Islam's spirituality. As the West struggles a loss of faith, it could learn much from a culture that suffuses everything it does with deep spirituality.

There is a remarkable ignorance in the West about the true nature of Islam, and it will need a massive effort to replace that ignorance with the knowledge that must be the basis for genuine understanding.

But the education needs to be in both directions. Just as we need to shatter Western stereotypes of Islam, so we need to fight suspicion in the Muslim World of the West and its motives. We need to convince Muslims that the West does not seek to corrupt their values or undermine their independence. We need to persuade them that our values are richer than an all-consuming obsession with wealth, and that our support for human rights and democracy is a genuine expression of our deeply held beliefs.

Breaking down this mutual mistrust will be a big task. It is not a job just for theologians and specialists. It needs clear and determined action from our governments and community leaders, based on mutual respect for each other's values. It needs our schools to teach the truth about each other's culture. It needs our media to tear down stereotypes rather than strengthen them.

Above all, it needs a new dialogue between us. Our governments need to talk. There are many issues on which we need to work together to tackle common problems. There is much we have to talk about, from drugs and global warming to the Middle East peace process and terrorism. A young life lost to heroin is as tragic in Cairo as it is in London. And terrorism is a curse on all our societies — a heinous crime both in Western law and Islamic law.

That is why I have proposed we build a dialogue between the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). It is an idea enthusiastically supported by Dr. Kharazi, foreign minister of Iran — which currently chairs the OIC secretary-general. Between us, we want to build a bond that can help underpin the political relationship between the West and Islam.

But dialogue between ministers and diplomats can never be enough. If we are to build real trust between the West and the Muslim World then we need to build a dialogue between our peoples as well. We need our opinion formers to break the circle of mistrust. We need our teachers and philosophers, artists and historians to sit down with one another and talk.

In this dialogue the Muslim communities in the West have a crucial role, as a bridge between us. They contribute to the countries and societies in which they live, while staying true to Islamic tradition and heritage. It is not always an easy balance to strike — avoiding the twin dangers of over-assimilation and isolation. But I believe in the U.K. we are getting it right, to the benefit of both the Muslim communities and the rest of British society.

The U.K.'s Muslim communities are flourishing. There are over 900 mosques in Britain. Some Islamic schools are now getting government funding. And well over a million British Muslims are playing a bigger and bigger role in the life of the country — from the economy, where hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on their entrepreneurial skills; to Britain's professions, where Islam's respect for learning is giving them an impressive presence; to the high street of every town in Britain, where Muslim cuisine has made a profound impression on all our people's lives.

The Foreign Secretary has tried to improve the British Foreign Office's own sensitivity to the needs and concerns of Britain's Muslim communities.

I hold regular meetings with the leaders of Britain's Muslim communities. We are sponsoring student exchanges and conferences designed to break down barriers. And we are determined to recruit bright young British Muslims into the Diplomatic Service. By joining, they will help us ensure that we get our relations with the Muslim World right.

Since the last Ramadan, we have made a concerted effort to solve some of the long-standing difficulties between us. We have given relations between Iran and Europe a fresh start, by finding a way forward over the fatwa on Salman Rushdie. We have opened up the possibility of normalising relations with Libya, by offering the third country trial of the Lockerbie suspects that the OIC itself called for.

But there have been difficult moments as well. Just before Ramadan we launched air strikes on the regime of Saddam Hussein. It was an action we did not want to take. We earnestly sought a peaceful outcome. We accepted Saddam Hussein's promises on numerous occasions, each time to have him renege upon them. Our case is well-known, and I do not want to rehearse it here.

But one point must be made. Saddam Hussein has tried to make out that this was a case of the West bullying Islam. He could not be more wrong. We acted because of the threat his chemical and biological weapons posed to the Gulf and the whole Middle East. We acted because he has a history of aggression against his neighbours and of brutal repression against his own people. We acted not against the Islamic World, but because Saddam Hussein is a clear threat to that world.

Saddam Hussein has called for a jihad against the West. Jihad is one of the few Islamic words with which most people in the West are familiar. It conjures up the stereotypical image of Islam they know, abused by unscrupulous dictators and lazy Hollywood script-writers.

What they need to know is that there is a higher jihad — not a holy war against the unbeliever, but a struggle inside man to be righteous and just. And that Ramadan is the time when the Holy Koran calls believers to contemplation on that struggle.

The holiest month in the Islamic calendar — and the only month mentioned in the Holy Koran — is therefore a good time to think about the relationship between Islam and the West, and to commit ourselves to doing everything in our power to strengthen that relationship.

The writer is the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State

Hidden inheritance

By Gail Vines

IMAGINE aliens from Outer Space announcing that they had engineered lasting alterations into the human race. The changes are going to make our children, and our children's children, smaller, weaker and easier to control. But grassroots resistance is fierce, and soon technicians are working round the clock to screen millions upon millions of human genomes in an effort to weed out anyone whose genes show signs of alien tinkering.

A mystery swiftly unfolds. The human genes appear to be untouched, yet downsized babies are born in ever-increasing numbers. Then, just when it looks like our number's up, the aliens take pity and decide to reveal their biotechnical know-how. "There's more to heredity than DNA," an alien boffin begins...

'Bizarre things are going on that we are just beginning to get a handle on'

Back in the real world, molecular biologists now sequencing DNA as part of the multimillion-dollar human genome project will finish the job in a few years. Yet masters of the genome we won't be. A spate of mysterious observations made by Earthling scientists suggest that those alien boffins are right — that there is a lot more to heredity than DNA.

Just as cells inherit genes, they also inherit a set of instructions that tell the genes when to become active, in which tissue and to what extent. This much is uncontroversial. Without this "epigenetic" instruction manual, multicellular organisms would be impossible. Every cell, whether it's a liver cell or a skin cell, inherits exactly the same set of genes, and it is the manual, which has different instructions for different cell types, that allows the cell to develop its distinctive identity.

Established theory has it that the instruction manual is wiped clean during the formation of sperm and egg cells, ensuring that all genes are equally available, until the embryo starts to develop specific tissues. But outlandish evidence now suggests that changes in the epigenetic instruction manual can sometimes be passed from parent to offspring. These findings have even inspired some biologists to suggest that changes in the manual passed down through the generations could provide a way for populations of animals to quickly adapt to their environment, creating a fast-track supplement to the more sedate Darwinian selection.

Speculation aside, one thing is certain. "Bizarre things are going on that we are just beginning to get a handle on," says Marcus Pembrey, a clinical geneticist at the Institute of Child Health in London. Consider the pregnant Dutch women who starved during the famine of the Second World War. Not unexpectedly, they had small babies. Far more surprisingly, those babies went on to have small babies, even though the post-war generation was well fed and no genes had been tinkered with.

Then there are the perplexing findings in mice and rats. Give just one generation of male rats a drug called alloxan, which decreases the body's sensitivity to the hormone insulin, and their offspring and their offspring's offspring become progressively more prone to diabetes. Expose mice to high doses of morphine and the damage to the nervous system persists in their descendants. And one injection of the thyroid hormone thyroxine into a newborn rodent permanently depresses levels of both that hormone and thyroid stimulating hormone — and levels remain low in the next generation, too.

Many of these observations are decades old and have long been relegated to the scrap heap of unexplained and inconvenient findings. They trouble geneticists, because they seem to fly in the face of classical genetics, even smacking of Lamarckian inheritance, the discredited notion that animals actively acquire characteristics and pass them on to their offspring — by Lamarck's reckoning, body builders would beget muscle-bound babies.

In fact, the way mammals are built should stop a parent's environment having any direct impact on its offspring's genes. The sperm and eggs are packed away in ovaries and testes from very early in development. While other cells become specialised, turning genes on and off to create the different tissues of the body, these "germ" cells remain quietly sequestered, shielded from the environment, until called upon to pass their still pristine genes on to the next generation.

So it's not surprising that scientists have tried to explain away the disturbing aftermath of the Dutch famine and the results of the mice and rat experiments with more conventional reasoning. Did the first generation of small babies suffer some strange hormonal imbalance which, when they reached adulthood, affected the growth of their infants in the womb? Or in the case of the rodent experiments — which passed down the male line, too — were the experiments just plain suspect? No firm conclusions were ever reached, but doubts lingered.

"It has become difficult for people to think of heredity as involving non-genetic material," says Steven Rose, a biologist at Britain's Open University in Milton Keynes. The research has continued, he says, but epigenetic research "remains semi-underground. You're not supposed to talk about it." That, however, could be about to change. Last year, Wolf Reik, a molecular biologist at the Babraham Institute outside Cambridge, and his colleagues at the Free University in Berlin, stumbled upon the best evidence yet that epigenetic changes can pass from one generation of mammals to the next.

Reik's main interest is in an epigenetic phenomenon called "imprinting". Genes exist in pairs, one from the mother, one from the father. And whereas most genes in animals such as mice and humans behave in exactly the same way regardless of which parent they come from, imprinted genes are different. In some cases, an imprinted gene is activated only if it is inherited from the father; in other cases, only if it comes from the mother. No one knows quite how this process works, but clearly some sort of "mark" must persist through the generations to tell the offspring's cells which genes to re-imprint.

While much about imprinted genes remains a mystery, initial studies suggest that they often help to regulate the growth of the foetus, and that they are marked for shutdown by small, molecular clusters called methyl groups. The methyl groups both block transcription — the first step in gene activation — and, by binding certain proteins, help to fold the DNA into tight, inaccessible coils. Other control mechanisms, still poorly understood, are also at work. But however they work, the existence of imprinted genes demonstrates that, each generation, not all genes are wiped totally clean of their epigenetic marks.

Last year, Reik and his colleagues found clues to the identity of genes that potentially, at least, carry epigenetic information with them as they move from parents to offspring. First, the researchers discovered that some genes become methylated if you move the nucleus from a just-fertilised mouse embryo into the egg of a mouse of a different strain that had had its nucleus removed, and then put the newly manufactured embryo into the womb of another mouse and let it develop normally. The resulting mouse pups were also noticeably smaller.

By measuring the amount of protein in the livers, brains and hearts of these mice, Reik was able to show that two genes had been shut down: a gene for a liver protein called major urinary protein (MUP) and a gene for a protein made in the cells lining the nose, called olfactory marker protein (OMP). Although the DNA sequence of each gene remained unchanged, they had been methylated.

But the real bombshell was yet to come. MUP proteins are usually secreted in mouse urine and, along with pheromones, are signalling chemicals vital to normal sexual behaviour in mice. OMP, on the other hand, is part of the olfactory system that allows mice to recognise pheromones. Not surprisingly, when the smaller mice grew up they were slow to mate. When they did mate eventually, Reik and his colleagues Irmand Roemer, Wendy Dean and Joachim Klose were amazed to discover that not only were the offspring smaller than usual, but that the MUP and OMP genes were again methylated and switched off. The epigenetic changes had passed down from one generation to the next.

Once you accept that epigenetic inheritance occurs, it's far easier to envisage how drugs, hormones and starvation could have created the bizarre transgenerational effects in rodents and perhaps even in humans, says Reik: the chemicals and the diet may have triggered the heritable methylation of certain genes. At first, however, "we tried very hard to disbelieve our results", says Reik. But as they checked and double-checked their data, and studied the literature, things just fell into place.

It turned out that there had been a smattering of earlier reports of mice inheriting epigenetic changes. Ten years ago, Christine Pouchet at the Pasteur Institute in Paris discovered that when a gene from a virus was inserted into mice it became methylated and silenced, and

— may be up to twice as large as normal. No one knows what causes the phenomenon, whether genes are "inappropriately" methylated or whether the oversized offspring, if bred, would pass the trait on. "But our observations raise the question of whether or not such manipulations could actually have a long-term impact by being transmitted to future generations," says Reik.

And if physical manipulations of embryos is all it takes to trigger inappropriate methylation of some genes, then that may be a good reason to worry about what happens to human sperm, eggs and embryos during high-tech fertility treatments. All three are routinely squirted through pipettes, swirled around in lab dishes, or frozen during procedures such as in vitro fertilisation or genetic testing of embryos. What's more, there have been some reports — albeit controversial — that babies born following IVF are smaller than normal.

Reik's mice also highlight another potentially worrying issue. Hurst, and developmental biologists such as Martin Johnson of the University of Cambridge, argue that in an effort to sell the genome sequencing projects to the public and the funding agencies, molecular biologists have created the misleading impression that genes alone run the show. The constant emphasis on the power of genes, he says, has created "a 20th-century form of fatalistic predestination", in which people believe they are the product of their genes, nothing more, nothing less. Even geneticists, he says, have lost sight of the huge range of environmental factors that can change a gene's activity, ranging from an adult's diet to certain high-tech fertility treatments. For those reasons, some geneticists are calling for a new definition of the gene, based on not only its DNA sequence, but also its epigenetic instruction manual — the degree of methylation, for example. But can epigenetic alterations, heritable or otherwise, really be worth the fuss? Yes, according to Eva Jablonka, an evolutionary biologist at Tel-Aviv University. In her book with Marion Lamb, *Epigenetic Inheritance and Evolution*, The Lamarckian Dimension, she points out that the idea that the effect of the environment on one generation's epigenetic instruction manual can be passed to the next is old hat to students of simpler organisms like bacteria, yeast, plants, and even fruit flies. For example, in yeast, the epigenetic silencing of one of two genes produces changes in sex that are inherited. And just a few months ago, Renato Puro of the Centre for Molecular Biology in Heidelberg, Germany, reported a striking example of epigenetic inheritance in laboratory fruit flies. The activity — but not the sequence — of a key gene was changed in embryos that went through a brief heat shock, activating another gene that caused the flies to have red eyes, a trait they passed on to their offspring.

Jablonka theorises that epigenetic inheritance in lower organisms at the very least play a key role in evolution by providing an additional source of variation on which selective pressures can act. Although epigenetic changes may be as random as mutations in the DNA sequence, they could also be adaptive, triggered by environmental changes to enable simple organisms to respond quickly to a fluctuating environment. For example, if one source of bacterial food is in short supply, heritable epigenetic modifications could help populations of bacteria to switch to another food source. Jablonka also points out that epigenetic inheritance is not at odds with classic inheritance via the genes. Instead, it would be a complementary inheritance system, with Darwin's natural selection acting on both the modified gene and on the genes that control epigenetic modifications.

Meanwhile, Pembrey, provocatively calling himself a "neo-Lamarckian", is prepared to stick his neck out even further, and suggest an adaptive role for epigenetic inheritance in higher organisms such as humans. He speculates that the inheritance of epigenetic factors which control a few select genes may have enabled human populations to regulate the

that the modification was passed on to the offspring. And in 1990, Azim Surani and his team at the Wellcome Trust and Cancer Research Campaign Institute of Cancer and Developmental Biology in Cambridge found other cases of epigenetic inheritance when genes were shifted from viruses into mice. Those earlier transgenic experiments were generally deemed too artificial to be of any consequence in the natural world.

Not so Reik's mice, it seems. "It's lovely work," says Lawrence Hurst, an evolutionary geneticist at the University of Bath. Transferring a nucleus from one mouse egg to another is undoubtedly an unnatural thing to do, but as Reik points out, the procedure could mimic changes that happen naturally. In of development, the activity of genes is in tremendous flux, being turned up and down as methyl groups and proteins are added and removed. Similarly, as the nucleus is moved from one egg to another in Reik's experiment, it experiences differences in temperature and concentrations of various chemicals, all of which could permanently change the methylation of certain genes.

Curiously, cloned lambs and calves created by nuclear transfer — a technique similar to the one used to create Reik's undersized mice

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'The constant emphasis on the power of genes... has created "a 20th-century form of fatalistic predestination", in which people believe they are the product of their genes, nothing more, nothing less'

growth of individuals according to food availability. Food shortages could generate physiological responses in adults, say, a change in hormone levels, that influence the activity of key growth genes. This could then be passed on to their offspring by varying the genes' methylation.

In the short term, such an adaptive mechanism could, for example, ensure that the baby's head is not too big for the mother's birth canal. In the longer term, if the offspring also passed those epigenetic changes on to their offspring, it would result in generations of progressively smaller people, until a period of plenty created the epigenetic changes that reversed the trend. The two generations of small babies that followed the Dutch famine could be explained by just such epigenetic adaptation, says Pembrey. Perhaps, he says, the giants of Patagonia (literally "the place of big feet") reported by Ferdinand Magellan in the 16th century and countless later European travellers, really did exist.

"What we can see now is the tip of the iceberg," says Marilyn Monk, a molecular embryologist and geneticist and a colleague of Pembrey's at the Institute of Child Health in London. She predicts that many more examples of epigenetic inheritance in mammals will come to light once geneticists develop ways to monitor methylation across the entire genome during an embryo's development. What's more, she says, the much-cherished notion that sperm and egg genes are totally sheltered in the ovaries and testes starts to look shaky when you examine it more closely: in humans, the primordial cells that generate eggs and sperm are busy dividing up until the 15th week of development.

Not everyone is prepared to take such radical positions as those of Lamb and Pembrey. John Maynard Smith, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Sussex, remains sceptical. He points out that even if epigenetic modifications occur naturally in mammals and are passed down the generations, there is still no reason to suspect that they are any more "adaptive" than random gene mutations that are passed on to offspring. Reik, too, cautions against overinterpreting his results. "Whether any such epimutations have any adaptive significance remains to be established," he says. No one has yet shown that inherited epigenetic changes occur naturally in mammals, and even if they did they may still be rare, random and inconsequential events — even downright dangerous.

Whatever the final verdict on the significance of epigenetic changes, one thing is already clear, says Hurst: "Epigenetics matters." As the human genome project rushes to completion, the really interesting insights are going to come not from the sequences, he predicts, but "from working out how genes are controlled".

— New Scientist

Saudi budget readies for lean time ahead

DUBAI (R) — Analysts say the Saudi government has produced a credible 1999 budget forecast and, despite the unpredictability of oil prices, the kingdom's economy looks capable of weathering any storms ahead.

But commentators added that economic diversification and fostering a growing private sector would prove more vital than ever to the Arab Gulf state in cushioning its economy against any further declines in global oil prices.

Economists estimated the 1999 budget had been calculated on an oil price of \$9-\$10 a barrel for Brent. Riyadh does not usually say what price it uses as a basis for its budget.

"It's a credible budget, the figures are credible and obviously it focuses on cutting spending rather than increasing revenues," a Saudi-based Western diplomatic source told Reuters.

Three weeks ago Saudi Arabia, the world's largest

oil producer and exporter, issued an austerity budget for 1999 that slashed spending by 15.8 per cent to 165 billion riyals (\$44 billion) in an attempt to ease the burden of low oil prices.

It also forecast a 144 per cent rise in the fiscal deficit to 44 billion riyals on revenue of 121 billion riyals, a 32 per cent drop from 1998's projected 178 billion riyals.

The actual budget deficit for 1998 was reported to have soared to 46 billion riyals from the 18 billion forecast, due to the impact of the lowest oil prices in 12 years.

The country relies on oil for some 70 per cent of revenues.

But the diplomatic source said the fact that the economy had managed to cope with slumping oil prices relatively well so far showed it had some resilience.

"I think it's a good sign that we have had 12 months

of falling oil prices and there has not been a major impact yet on the Saudi economy," he said.

Bankers and analysts also said Saudi Arabia was likely to be able to finance its budget deficit internally without having to resort to foreign borrowing.

"The size of the deficit is no surprise and we agree with the government analysis that they believe they will be able to finance that internally within the kingdom," said a senior executive at a Riyadh-based bank who declined to be named.

The budget announcement also attempted to soothe public concerns over spending cuts.

King Fahd said spending would only be cut slightly on social security, social aid, health and education and that the budget allowed for completing projects that were already under way.

Economists have said the government is running out of easy ways to cut spending and was bracing for

painful new reforms.

They added it had little room to manoeuvre as state wages make up a big chunk of the budget.

The king also stressed the important role the private sector should play in lessening dependence on government spending.

This attempt at diversifying the economy away from oil and reliance on the government would play a key role in determining the resilience of the Saudi economy for the long term, commentators said.

"There are positive indications the government is taking action in such areas as privatising certain parts of the economy that are presently in public hands," the bank executive said.

"Also, the growing vigour and strength of the private sector bodes well for the economy in the long term," he added.

But he indicated that in the short term much still depended on how oil prices fared over the next nine

months or so.

The diplomatic source said there was now a trend within the private sector of moving away from reliance on government contracts.

"Exactly how far that trend has gone is impossible to specify, but a lot of businessmen are saying they are not that bothered about major budget cuts because a lot of their business is not government-related," he added.

Beshr Bakheet of Bakheet Financial Advisors said the region's financial markets also had an important role to play in reducing oil dependency and drawing private wealth back into the region.

"These markets will act as a cushion for the volatile oil prices, by pumping private wealth that was accumulated since the start of the oil boom into the local financial system, thus minimising the large swings of oil prices that determine government revenues," he said in a report.

U.S. 1998 inflation at 12-year low

WASHINGTON (R) — U.S. consumer prices barrel rose in December, causing the government's main inflation gauge to end 1998 with its smallest annual rise in 12 years, the Labour Department has said.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 0.1 per cent last month after a 0.2 per cent rise in the prior month. That brought the increase for the year to just 1.6 per cent — the weakest since a 1.1 per cent rise in 1986 when the CPI was held down by plummeting energy prices.

"The numbers continue to tell the same theme: Solid growth with low inflation," said Charles Reinhard, fixed income strategist at ABN Amro Inc.

December saw a pickup in the closely watched core CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, but that was mainly the result of a spike in tobacco costs.

"If tobacco prices had been unchanged, the core would have been up only one tenth (of a percentage point) and the 'all items' would have been unchanged," said Patrick Jackman, an economist at the Bureau of Labour Statistics.

The core CPI rose by 0.3 per cent last month after a 0.2 per cent increase in November.

The rise in tobacco prices was widely expected after announcements by tobacco companies, and economists have tended to view it as an isolated phenomenon that is not reflective of economic trends.

Jackman told Reuters Television that more tobacco price increases were imminent as recent discounting by manufacturers ended and as California, the biggest state in the United States, implemented a tobacco tax rise in January.

"So there will still be some increases in tobacco prices down the road," he said.

The latest inflation figures were more benign than most economists had projected and the release of the data helped to bolster U.S. bond prices.

Economists in a Reuters survey had projected a 0.2 per cent rise in the CPI in December and a 0.4 per cent increase in the core index. Energy costs tumbled 1.4 per cent in December.

Posting an 8.8 per cent decrease for all of 1998. Tobacco prices were up 18.3 per cent last month, ending the year 31.8 per cent higher.

In the latest month, food costs were flat, while housing prices edged up 0.1 per cent.

Energy costs have been a key factor holding down prices over the past year. Economic woes in Asia and many emerging economies have depressed demand for

oil and other commodities, sending costs for gasoline and heating oil sharply lower.

But unlike in 1986, strong downward pressure on inflation has been evident in a broad array of economic sectors as producers of goods such as clothing and electronics have had to slash prices amid weak demand in the sluggish global economy, meaning plenty of bargains for U.S. consumers.

In a separate report, the Labour Department said new claims for unemployment benefits fell slightly last week but the decline was not as steep as economists had expected.

Initial claims for unemployment insurance totalled 352,000 in the week ended Jan. 9, down from a revised 356,000 in the prior week. Economists had expected jobless claims to fall to 333,000.

Russia cashes in on rouble fall with 5% export tax

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russia has slapped a five per cent windfall tax on a range of gas, coal and mineral exports in a move to boost empty government coffers with extra revenues exporters have earned from the rouble's collapse.

A government decree imposes the levy on coal, natural gas, copper and nickel exports, the Interfax news agency reported.

Exports to other members of the 12-member Commonwealth of Independent States are not affected by the new tariff, the agency reported.

Overseas clients purchase Russia's vast mineral wealth in foreign currency, a boon which has ironically left exporters rouble-rich as the Russian unit crashed 70 per cent against the dollar last year following an August financial crisis.

The new levy will cream off some of those additional roubles and feed them into government accounts and help ease a state cash crisis which lay at the root of the August financial crisis.

"We have created an enabling environment

European, Asian ministers see signs of Asian growth recovery

FRANKFURT (R) — Jolted by the financial crisis engulfing Brazil, Asian and European finance ministers from 25 countries ended a two-day meeting on a note of guarded optimism, agreeing that there were signs of an economic rebound in Asia nearly two years after cascading devaluations triggered a slump in output across the region.

In the view of the ministers some signs of recovery are expected in the current year, and in the medium term the efforts undertaken by the Asian countries will lay the foundations for regaining steady growth," a closing statement said.

But the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Michel Camdessus, expressed concern that Japan, the world's second largest economy, had still not done enough to be sure of pulling quickly out of its deepest recession in half a century.

"Recent policy actions and developments are welcome but may not be sufficient to turn the economy around before next year," Camdessus said.

Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, who agreed that Japan was still an exception to the brightening regional trend, said the Asian crisis had shown how hard it was for governments to defend fixed exchange rates against the dollar when faced by a sudden exodus of hot money.

Miyazawa, who is pushing for a new global currency order that would preserve an important role for the yen, suggested Asian countries should reduce their fixation on the dollar — still the world's undisputed reserve currency but likely to be challenged in time by the European Union's new single currency, the euro.

"Instead of pegging only to the dollar they could use a basket of currencies which might include the euro," he said.

Asia has been inspired in its search for greater regional currency stability by the successful launch by 11 European Union (EU) countries of the single currency, the euro, on Jan. 1.

Tokyo in particular is worried that the advent of the single currency will reduce Japan's political and financial clout in the world and would like the yen to be at the hub of any new regional system.

Japan has won political backing for its goals from France and Germany, whose finance minister, Oskar Lafontaine, renewed his call on Saturday for "flexible stability" on exchange rates.

"We all agree that we need to make big efforts to arrive at more stable exchange rates. We need flexible stability to avoid the misadventures of recent years," Lafontaine said.

The communique was equally oblique, saying merely that ministers had held an "extensive discussion on the economic conditions surrounding

the choice of exchange rate regimes."

The lack of detail apparently reflected deep misgivings in some countries, among central bankers in particular, about the viability of any formal arrangements to tame currencies.

"In a world characterised by highly integrated and sophisticated international financial markets, there is serious doubt whether target zones for exchange rates are feasible," Wim Duisenberg, president of the European Central Bank, told the meeting.

Even some Asian participants in the Frankfurt talks were cautious about the Miyazawa initiative, let alone grander ambitions to replicate Europe's single currency.

"To say that there is agreement on this (Miyazawa plan) at this time is premature," Malaysia's second finance minister, Mustapa Mohammad, said.

"We are not Europe, with convergence of policies, monetary and fiscal. Our problems are different, our history is different, it is a totally different kind of situation," he stressed.

"These have been undoubtedly troubled times for the global economy. What started off in Asia and then moved to Russia has now hit Latin America, and its important for us to know that all world authorities remain vigilant," British Finance Minister Gordon Brown told the BBC.

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"We are not Europe, with convergence of policies, monetary and fiscal. Our problems are different, our history is different, it is a totally different kind of situation," he stressed.

"These have been undoubtedly troubled times for the global economy. What started off in Asia and then moved to Russia has now hit Latin America, and its important for us to know that all world authorities remain vigilant," British Finance Minister Gordon Brown told the BBC.

"We have been equally oblique, saying merely that ministers had held an "extensive discussion on the economic conditions surrounding

the choice of exchange rate regimes."

The lack of detail apparently reflected deep misgivings in some countries, among central bankers in particular, about the viability of any formal arrangements to tame currencies.

"In a world characterised by highly integrated and sophisticated international financial markets, there is serious doubt whether target zones for exchange rates are feasible," Wim Duisenberg, president of the European Central Bank, told the meeting.

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Menem proposes dollar for Americas

BUENOS AIRES (R) — President Carlos Menem said this week he had directed his economy minister to study the possibility of adopting the U.S. dollar as the common currency throughout the Americas.

Menem said he told Economy Minister Roque Fernandez to analyse whether the dollar could be adopted by South America's Mercosur trade

bloc and later throughout a future Free Trade Area for the Americas (FTAA).

A leading member of Argentina's centre-left opposition alliance, Graciela Fernandez Meijide, ridiculed Menem's proposal and said Mercosur was years behind the European Union, most of whose members recently adopted the euro as a collective currency.

"He is forgetting the work over years that Europe carried out to reduce the differences between its countries," she said.

Mercosur linked Argentina and Brazil in a customs union along with Uruguay and Paraguay. Chile and Bolivia were associate members. Leaders from throughout the Americas have held early talks to establish the FTAA

from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego by 2005.

The economy minister told reporters that Argentine officials would meet with representatives of the U.S. Treasury to discuss a future Americas wide role for the dollar.

But Fernandez added: "You shouldn't get too excited about this measure because we are talking about a project for the long-term."

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com

ACROSS

- 1 Moist
- 5 San Diego ballplayer
- 10 Engrave
- 14 Frankenstein's assistant
- 15 Chiller
- 16 Hold sway
- 17 Indian garb
- 18 Voyeur
- 20 Unprincipled fellows
- 22 Fast-food orders
- 23 Dinner course
- 24 En (in one group)
- 25 Casual top
- 27 Lathers
- 32 Facility
- 35 Tarzan flon
- 36 Dishwater
- 37 Stenutations
- 39 Michigan city
- 40 Remained
- 41 Litter dropper
- 42 Mr. Ed's dinner
- 43 City on the Ruhr
- 44 Prune
- 46 Yellowish white
- 48 Academy Award
- 52 Senior citizens
- 56 Process for sorting the injured
- 57 Transparent
- 59 Crisscross framework
- 60 Tibetan monk
- 61 Shoot from cover
- 62 Kapt back
- 63 Chief Norse god
- 64 Jackson's Secretary of War
- 65 Three-spot

DOWN

- 1 Harrow blades
- 2 Guam capital
- 3 Upright
- 4 Snoop-for-hire
- 5 Dice marks
- 6 Dead-eye
- 7 Oil intake
- 8 Meal
- 9 Estrada and Salsa
- 10 Therefore: Latin
- 11 Ballerina's skirt
- 12 Blood formation
- 13 Skirt edges
- 19 "Schindler's List" star
- 21 Harris and Wynn
- 24 Wine measurement units
- 26 Pay attention to
- 28 1998 Clooney film
- 29 Continent
- 30 Map of lots
- 31 Brief times
- 32 Being: Latin
- 33 Picnic pests
- 34 Red and Bering
- 36 Fast-food option
- 38 Peak
- 39 Sympathy
- 41 Chase
- 44 Eclipse revelation
- 45 In favor
- 47 Poem
- 49 Concerned person
- 50 Nimble
- 51 "I Am Woman" singer
- 52 Capital of Norway
- 53 Star part
- 54 Moore of "G.I. Jane"
- 55 Musiel or Goiz
- 56 Next
- 58 U.S. publishing grp.

Peanuts

I'VE DECIDED TO COLLECT A BUNCH OF ROCKS AND BUILD MYSELF A NICE STURDY HOME

ALWAYS START WITH THE BEDROOM...

Andy Capp

HI, SUE - HI, ANDY

YOU BELONG TO THE CHURCH?

YES

I'VE BEEN GOING THERE FOR THREE OR FOUR YEARS NOW AND I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU

I DIDN'T SAY I WAS A FANATIC

Mutt'n' Jeff

WELL, THIS MAY COME AS A SURPRISE TO YOU, BUT I HEARD THAT THE BOSS HAS BEEN THINKING ABOUT REVERSING THE SITUATION FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS!

YOU MEAN AS A SURPRISE TO YOU? MAKE ME AS SURE AS YOU CAN!

IS THAT TRUE, BOSS?

WELL, I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT!

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen

GLASBERGEN 1-9

POTATO CHIPS

"My doctor told me to eat twice as much fruit. Two times nothing is still nothing."

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

OPTIA

THABI

YARRIT

SOKEEP

Answer: POTATO, CHIPS, FRUIT, NOTHING

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Trade balance deficit narrows

ACCORDING TO sources at the Department of Statistics, national Jordanian exports dropped by three per cent during the first eleven months of last year. This decline was accompanied also by an 8.5 per cent drop in the value of re-exports and a fall in value of imports by 6.5 per cent.

A report issued by the department last week showed the volume of exports at JD942.2 million during the first eleven months of 1998 compared to JD970.9 million during the same period of 1997. Re-exports were down from 214.0 million in 1997 to JD195.9 million during the period covered. Imports totalled JD2,424.9 million during the eleven months of 1998 compared to a JD2,593.3 million in 1997.

Based on the aforementioned data, the January-November trade balance for 1998

recorded a JD1,286.8 million deficit compared to a JD1,408.4 million deficit for 1997. In other words, the trade balance deficit narrowed by 8.6 per cent last year.

The department latest records for November 1998 indicated that the deficit in the trade balance narrowed by 45.6 per cent as the deficit amounted to JD80.4 million compared to JD147.8 million during November 1997. The statistics revealed that exports increased by 12.4 per cent as they reached JD89.6 million during November 1998 compared to JD79.7 million during the same month of 1997.

Re-exports and imports dropped during November 1998 by 14.6 per cent and 24.4 per cent respectively as they totalled JD18.2 million (JD21.3 million in 1997) and JD188.2 million (JD248.8 million in 1997).

Sharansky: 'A free trade agreement between Jordan and Israel will greatly help to develop the Jordanian economy'

NATAN SHARANSKY, Israel's minister of industry and trade, is undoubtedly sure that implementing a free trade agreement is the best way to increase the volume of trade exchange between Jordan and Israel. He dismissed that such an agreement would result in flooding the Jordanian market with Israeli goods and in destroying the Jordanian economy.

"The opposite is true," he stressed in an interview with the Alam Al Tijarat magazine this month. "Such fears emerged among Israeli industrialists when a free trade agreement was signed between Israel and the European Common Market in 1975 and then with the United States in 1985 and what happened was just the opposite."

"Not only damages did not occur but the

Israeli industry moved a step forward and was able to compete in these markets," he said noting that Israeli exports to the U.S. and European markets rose sharply. "Undoubtedly a free trade agreement between Jordan and Israel will greatly help to develop the Jordanian economy," he emphasised.

Asked how can a free trade agreement be implemented before resolving trade barriers and transport impediments at crossing points, Sharansky said Israel is doing much to remove barriers impeding trade between the two countries. "Lately, I ordered that there should be no need to obtain an import licence for buying goods and products from Jordan. Furthermore now it is possible to transport goods between Jordan and Israel on a door-to-door basis," he said (J.T.).

Asian equity issues seen topping \$60b in '99

HONGKONG (AFP) — Asian equity issues in 1999 could top \$60 billion as businesses go on a capital-raising spree to reduce massive debt ratios and governments dispose of assets, said a report received here this week.

The report by S.G. Securities Research Ltd., an arm of the French bank Societe Generale, said cash calls were "the most important" theme of 1999 as the region attempts to emerge from a biting recession.

"The Asian crisis is primarily a private sector problem which created huge losses that worsened the already problematic gearing ratios of most corporations in Asia," S.G. Securities said.

"These corporations' businesses cannot return to nor-

mal until they undergo the recapitalisation process. This inevitably means massive capital-raising exercises throughout 1999," it added.

"After adding the likely privatisation exercises of the deficit-running regional governments, we expect equity issues worth more than \$60 billion throughout Asia in 1999," S.G. Securities indicated.

The last two weeks of December saw an array of cash call announcements that S.G. Securities said was "a taste of things to come."

The South Korean government raised \$300 million by selling a 5.1 per cent stake in the giant Pohang Iron and Steel Co., and announced the listing of S.K. Telecommunications Ltd., privatisation of which could

raise \$1 billion this year.

The top five South Korean conglomerates agreed to raise \$15 billion through rights issues in 1999.

Bank International Indonesia will raise \$800 million to one billion dollars in a rights issue in early 1999.

The Philippine National Bank announced an issue of more than \$100 million worth of preference shares.

Thai Airways selected lead advisors to sell 335 million shares.

The Petroleum Authority of Thailand expects to raise up to \$850 million from the float of 20 per cent of its shares in mid-1999.

Debt-equity levels of companies in the region are dangerously high, and they need fresh capital to reduce leverage, S.G. Securities

said, citing Singapore and Hong Kong entities as exceptions.

"Many of these companies face a credit crunch as they lack capital to get slightly easier terms on maturing debt or to ask for more working capital loans," it said.

S.G. Securities estimated that South Korea would see at least \$25 billion worth of new shares issued in 1999, putting the total amount required in recapitalisation over the next 12 to 18 months at more than \$100 billion.

Equity issues in Thailand were estimated at \$15 billion, Indonesia four to five billion dollars and Malaysia \$6.5 billion.

Companies in Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines are generally

well-capitalised, but "there have been some losers and they will tap the market for capital," the report said.

"There should be new issues totalling five to seven billion dollars from these markets in 1999," it added.

S.G. Securities warned that the capital-raising exercises, offering investors an opportunity to raise their Asian exposure without buying expensive stocks, could soak up liquidity and hit stock markets, which have been rising in recent months as interest rates head lower.

"The competition from new shares should strongly clip the upside in the secondary market, particularly when not supported by fundamentals," it said.

Swedish government sold PharmaciaUpjohn stake

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — The Swedish government said this week that it had profited from a large increase in share value of the Swedish-U.S. drugmaker PharmaciaUpjohn and sold most of its seven per cent stake in the company for 13.3 billion kroner (\$1.68 billion).

"This is a very good deal for the Swedish state," Trade and Industry Minister Bjorn Rosengren told TT news agency. "Today's share price is 57 per cent higher than 12 months ago."

Thirty-one million shares, amounting to 6.1 per cent of the stake, were sold at \$55 apiece, the ministry said.

The government had said for some time that it would sell the stake, but announced on Jan. 4 that the move was imminent because of the rise in the value of shares.

The sale was administered by investment banks J.P. Morgan and Goldman Sachs, with participation by Swedish Enskilda Securities.

The banks have an option to buy the Swedish government's remaining 0.9 per cent stake within the next 30 days.

The total value of the Swedish seven per cent stake was estimated at some 15 billion kroner. Rosengren said the size of its stake gave the government limit-

ed influence over the company and that it could put the funds raised to use in other ways to "stimulate economic growth."

Finance Minister Erik Astbrink said the money would probably be used for repayments of the public debt, though other investments "might be of interest."

PharmaciaUpjohn was created through a merger between Swedish Pharmacia and American Upjohn in 1995.

The company meanwhile announced that it had appointed a new chief executive officer, Magnus Lundberg, to PharmaciaUpjohn Diagnostics, with headquarters in Uppsala, central Sweden.

On Jan. 4, Rosengren said he had met PharmaciaUpjohn's American Chief Executive Fred Hassan before announcing the share sale. Hassan had said that there were no plans to move PharmaciaUpjohn's research and development from Sweden.

In recent months observers have expressed concern about a "trend" among big Swedish companies to leave the country — the latest example being AstraZeneca, which headquar-

ters are to be situated in London after the Swedish-British merger. AstraZeneca's research division will remain in Sweden.

Volvo buys into truckmaker Scania, but merger hopes are clouded

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — Swedish automaker Volvo said this week it had bought a large stake in the truckmaker Scania for \$658 million, but its hopes for a merger ran smack into hostility from Scania and its main shareholder.

Volvo said it had acquired 13.6 million A shares and 12.1 million B shares for 5.2 billion kroner, representing 13.47 per cent of Scania's voting interest and 12.85 per cent of its capital interest.

A merger between the two Swedish companies would create Europe's biggest and the world's second biggest manufacturer of heavy trucks and buses.

Volvo said it welcomed discussions with Scania's shareholders regarding a potential merger, but would not launch a hostile bid. It had been in talks with Scania's main shareholder, Investor, over the past year.

According to the latest available data, Investor has 44.9 per cent of voting rights in Scania. Other big shareholders are the insurance companies SPP and SEG Trygg Liv, which hold 4.3 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively, and the bank SEB Fonder, which holds 4.2 per cent. Foreign owners hold 14.3 per cent of voting rights.

In Brussels, Scania chairman and chief executive officer Leif Oestling said Volvo's purchase was "very close to a hostile bid."

Oestling, speaking at the International Commercial Vehicles Show in the Belgian capital, said the Scania's management had noted the acquisition "with sur-

prise."

He said no advance negotiations about a merger had been conducted with Scania's management.

Separately, Investor's Chief Executive Claes Dahlbaeck said it was "unfortunate" that Volvo had "made the talks previously held more difficult."

The reason why the talks have not given any results is that Investor and Volvo have different views on the value of Scania, Dahlbaeck said.

"A merger with Volvo could mean significant synergies, but at the same time we see other alternatives that could prove just as interesting," he said, adding: "We intend to keep up talks with interested parties."

Volvo's chief executive, Leif Johansson, said Volvo and Scania would be "a very good combination for customers, shareholders and employees."

But at a press conference he also said it was premature to talk of ownership and how a possible bid for all of Scania would be financed.

"We have not placed a bid today," he said. "We only intended to create a good situation for Volvo and Scania, not to be hostile," he added.

Johansson also said Volvo's move to take a stake in Scania does not have any implications on Volvo's plans to find a partner for its car operations.

"This just means we continue our strategy established two years ago, in which we decided that our truck operations should grow organically and through acquisitions, while we are seeking partnerships for our car

operations," press officer Stefan Lorentzon said.

Swedish Trade and Industry Minister Bjorn Rosengren said he would welcome a merger. He would be particularly pleased if the deal made the two companies stay in the country, he said.

The world auto industry market is in a period of consolidation, caused by overcapacity but also by the rising costs of developing new designs, which makes it harder for smaller firms to stay in the race without the support of a wealthy parent.

Volvo has been the subject of rumours that the company, or its car division — valued by analysts at 2.5 billion to three billion euros (\$2.9-\$3.4 billion) — could be taken over by Italy's Fiat or Ford of the United States.

Volvo planned an alliance with Renault of France but this broke down in 1993.

Volvo also said its heavy truck division had registered record sales in 1998, with sales rising by 21 per cent to 83,279 units.

Also in Brussels, the DaimlerChrysler A.G. board member who is responsible for commercial vehicles, Kurt Lauk, said his company was among the first to be offered a stake in Scania but rejected it as too expensive.

"We knew that Scania was in the market and we were among the first to be offered to take a stake in Scania, and we declined because it didn't make sense economically," he told AFX News, a financial news subsidiary of AFP.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You may have tough authority figures to deal with, but most of the hassle is over. That's a good reason to celebrate with friends over lunch or an early dinner. A relationship with a rather unusual person could develop into something more. The main thing the two of you have in common is your insatiable curiosity.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) The moon is in Aquarius, giving you a taste of things to come. The sun will be in Aquarius soon, and you'll have to settle down to business. Practice by figuring out what your next career move ought to be. If you don't have a career, this is an excellent day to do the planning.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) The moon's in Aquarius today, and the sun will be going there on Wednesday. Aquarius is in your solar ninth house of travel and higher education. It strengthens and encourages your natural abilities. This coming phase will be perfect for launching either a voyage or jumping into another scholastic adventure.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) The moon's in Aquarius, in your solar eighth house of finances, specifically money you share with other people. The sun's going into Aquarius on Wednesday; then you'll really have to get into gear. This is an excellent time of year to make lots of money and stash it away wisely. Get ready to do that, by catching up on your reading.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You might as well decide first thing this morning to go along with whatever your partner says. If you put resist, you could be ground into mince meat. Your partner, business or romantic, has the advantage right now. Learn to enjoy following and you'll be a better person for it. It's also the most comfortable way to get through this day.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) You're going to have a lot more work, possibly due to an increase in responsibility. Might as well get used to it. These conditions will get even more intense in the coming weeks, as the moon transits through Aquarius in your sixth house of work. Aquarius represents technical details and scientific inquiry, so it ought to be interesting.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) You've run into one upsetting situation after another in the last few weeks, but you know that love would find a way. And it looks like love is circling in on the solution to the original problem and any other that have come up since then. Even the nervous tension you've had recently is starting to fade. The worst is over.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) You're still in a good frame of mind to learn, and listen. This will come in handy, since the conversation seems to be complicated, and very intense. You don't agree with everything, but at least you're hearing what they have to say, and probably figuring out what you're going to say next.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Did you know that Sagittarius is the sign of higher education, religion and philosophy? Right now, as the moon goes through Aquarius, you have even greater wisdom. Aquarius is your solar third house of education, and it's also a scholarly sign. The combination of the two signs is awesome, especially today. Make the most of it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You may feel like your energy is waning, but it's not an altogether unpleasant sensation. It's as if, in the cosmic scheme of things, you've got your act together, and you're ready to take it on the road and make some money with it. So, you might as well relax and enjoy it.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) Are you feeling stronger, more decisive, even a little better looking? You look like the intellectual that you truly are, the person who's going to figure out how to save the world. Yes, it's a massive job, but you can handle it. First, take care of that little job you left undone. If you can't remember what it is, don't worry. Somebody will remind you.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You've been learning teamwork for the last few weeks, and you should have it down by now. The next phase will be more introspective. You'll be cleaning house, in a way, by changing your habit patterns and thought processes. There's a possibility to do that, anyway, if you're up for it, and today is a great day to start.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

BMB profit slides 19%

MANAMA (AFP) — Bahrain Middle East Bank's (BMB) profit fell 19 per cent in 1998 mainly as a result of a disastrous trading year on the Kuwait stock exchange, its chairman has said. The offshore bank recorded a net profit of \$15.1 million, down from \$18.7 million in 1997, Abdul Rahman Salem Al Ateaqi said. The bank is now discontinuing trading activity on the Kuwaiti bourse, a process that will take several months to complete and result in some 103 million dollars worth of losses, he said.

Indian beggars earn half the wages of a middle-class employee

NEW DELHI (AFP) — An average family of beggars in the Indian capital New Delhi earns more than \$100 a month — half the wages of a middle-class employee, a report has said.

The Asian Age daily said a family of beggars with three children could earn more than \$5,000 rupees (\$119) a month "displaying blood-soaked wounds ... hunched, hand-capped youth with crutches and scores of others clutching at your feet."

"I earn about 100 rupees (\$2.3) a day and at times it reaches to 150 rupees," said Lakku Bai, a migrant from the northern state of Rajasthan, who has been begging for 12 years.

The newspaper said the beggars were "controlled by organised groups" and operated with the "blessings of local policemen."

Beggars are a common sight in all Indian towns, cities and pilgrimage centres. In major towns and tourist destinations,

individual alms offered to them can be as high as 100 rupees (\$2.3) or more.

Senior police officer Kiran Bedi was quoted as saying "beggary menace at the traffic crossings has worsened and it is pathetic to see that the entire place is being controlled by the beggars."

Most of the beggars interviewed by the daily said they did not want to take up any other business as begging was a "profitable" venture.

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Corretja and Davenport kick off Open

AUSTRALIA (AP) — In-form players Alex Corretja and Lindsay Davenport get the first Grand Slam of the year underway when the Australian Open starts at Melbourne Park on Monday.

Corretja, the No. 2 seed and French Open runner-up, will play the opening match on center court against Japan's Takao Suzuki.

American Davenport, the top women's player, starts her pursuit of back-to-back Grand Slam wins against Gaia Leon Garcia of Spain.

Davenport won the women's event at the Sydney Adidas International on Saturday, beating her close rival and world No. 2 Martina Hingis in straight sets.

It was an impressive victory and her first since robbing the Swiss star of the No. 1 ranking in October.

Before that, Davenport had defeated Hingis in the U.S. Open final to win the first Grand Slam event of her career.

Davenport is justifiably full of confidence ahead of the Australian Open after sweeping aside Hingis and Steffi Graf in the semis.

"I've always said Australian and New York would be my best chance because of the surface and as it turns out the next one is Australia since winning my only one," Davenport said.

"I've put together some great matches to get confidence going into this week." Both the men's and women's draws are considered wide open.

"It's difficult to pick these days," Davenport said.

"There's a lot of girls who have a good chance of winning and it's a very open field as to who is the favorite and who will walk away with the title," Corretja



Australian teenager Jelena Dokic plays backhand in her match against Monica Seles during a one set charity exhibition match on center court at Melbourne Park venue for the Australian Open beginning today (Reuters photo)

has never been beyond the third round of the Australian Open and was found wanting when American Todd Martin beat him in Saturday's final.

"TODD always going to be in contention and we have to keep him in mind," Corretja said. "It's going to be a very open Open, many players will have the chance to do well there." Thomas Enqvist has shaped as an outside chance for the title following his win in the AAPT Championships in Adelaide and Colonial Classic exhibition event over the past week in Melbourne.

The Swede, who starts against American Jan-Michael Gambill Monday, could come up against hometown heroes Pat Rafter in the third round and maybe Mark Philippoussis in the fourth.

"Maybe I won't be very popular in Australia this week," Enqvist said. "But I won't mind too much if I can be still here in the second week." Enqvist impressed Philippoussis by beating him in the Colonial final.

"He hit the ball so clean, he's playing great tennis," Philippoussis said. "He has the best record of any player in the world this year, he hasn't lost a match in two tournaments." Rafter will play the third match on center court. He is struggling for match fitness after a 1-2 record this year.

The U.S. Open champion lost in the first round of the Adidas International before disappearing to Melbourne to try to hide from public attention.

Rafter admits he has failed to live up to expectations at home, but he is expected to breeze past Germany's Oliver Gross.

ATP to seek two-year drug ban

MELBOURNE (R) — The Association of Tennis Professionals will seek to double the sport's current penalty for doping to two years, bringing them into line with International Olympic Committee guidelines.

An ATP spokesman said the Players' Council on Sunday approved a resolution calling for the current 12-month suspension for any player found guilty of using a Class One drug to be doubled.

The resolution will now be passed to the ATP Board, which is expected to ratify the rule change. It would then go before the International Tennis Federation.

The two-year ban would be imposed on first offenders found guilty of using drugs such as steroids, including the steroid nandrolone, which was detected in reigning Australian Open champion Petr Korda during last year's Wimbledon championships.

Korda escaped suspension, but was forced to forfeit prize money and computer ranking points earned at Wimbledon, where he made the quarter-finals.

The 30-year-old Czech won a reprieve after satisfy-

ing the ITF's independent appeals committee that there were exceptional circumstances in his case.

The ITF announced last week it would challenge the appeal committee's decision on the grounds that it had misapplied the rule governing exceptional circumstances. The ITF appeal is to be heard by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne.

At a meeting on Saturday night, the world's leading male players dismissed talk of possible protest action over Korda's positive drug test and will await the outcome of court cases.

ATP Tour chief executive officer Mark Miles rejected Australian media speculation about a possible player boycott of the Australian Open, which begins in Melbourne on Monday.

After the three-hour annual players' meeting, which Korda attended without addressing his fellow players, player representative Todd Martin rejected the boycott talk as a media "concoction".

A grim-faced Korda, the Australian Open champion, left the meeting without speaking to the media.

Martin added that the players respected Korda for

attending the meeting and that the majority had no problem with the Czech defending his only Grand Slam title.

"I think we do want to know the exceptional circumstances and it's just a matter of convincing the general player body that we need to wait until the end of the appeal system and then we'll know everything that's happened," Martin said.

After that, Korda would be allowed to play on if his innocence was established, he said.

"If not, if he's found guilty at that point then he will both return his prize money and his points from the tournaments he has played since the test was taken last July and he will take his 12-month, or whatever length, suspension."

Some players, including Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman, had spoken out against Korda over the past two weeks while others, including dual U.S. Open champion Pat Rafter, urged caution until the full facts were known.

Jenny Thompson sets sights on world record

SYDNEY (AFP) — after setting a new record in Olympic gold medalist the 100 metre individual medley Saturday. The American has set a new

world record at every short-course swimming meet she has competed in recently and expects this week's event in Hobart to be no exception.

Thompson broke the 100-metre individual medley at the World Cup shortcourse meeting in Sydney, shaving .02 of a second off the world mark set by Slovakian Martina Moravcova one month ago.

Her time of 1:00.41 gave Thompson her third world short course record in weeks. She set the 50-metre and 100-metre butterfly marks at College Station, Texas last month.

"I guess I'm on a roll," the five-time Olympic gold medalist said. "The one goal I verbally set myself before I came here was that I wanted to get that record. I have come close to it before so I knew it was within reach."

Thompson said she was setting her sights on Chinese swimmer Le Jingyi's 100-metre freestyle record during the Hobart leg of the World Cup series which begins Monday.

"Maybe in Hobart I definitely think it's attainable and I look to do that in the future at some point," she said. "I'll just go in with the same attitude. I'll just try and improve what I've done in all my swims."

Sampras legacy — just who can win the Australian Open?

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Pete Sampras certainly left a crater with his bombshell announcement not to chase tennis history at next week's Australian Open.

The world No. 1 for a record sixth consecutive year, Sampras is one win away from equalling Roy Emerson's record 12 Grand Slam titles yet the game's premier player canned the opportunity, albeit temporarily, due to fatigue.

There are multiple contenders queuing up to fill the Sampras void in the year's first Grand Slam tournament, with no crystal clear favourite emerging.

Chilean Marcelo Rios, who supplanted Sampras twice at No. 1 last year, returns to Melbourne as world No. 2 and proxy top seed.

Rios left here last year with his doubters over his commitment to fight after he succumbed meekly to Petr Korda in his first Grand Slam final.

He's back this time fortified by a splendid year studded with seven titles in eight finals and the winner of 68 matches, yet now he has become a target and his resilience will again be tested on the shimmering courts of Melbourne Park.

Much-improved Spaniard Alex Corretja is the second seed, yet his Australian record is hardly encouraging, winning only four of his seven matches in three years.

Patrick Rafter will have Australia urging him on, but therein lies the problem for the two-time U.S. Open champion.

It's the weight of national

expectation that has crushed the life out of Rafter's Australian Open challenges in the past, and his leadup form is dreadful, forcing him into a hastily arranged weekend hip to get in some much-needed match practice.

Yet if Rafter can somehow negotiate the minefield in the opening week and crank up his game he is a genuine contender.

Andre Agassi is talking up a shot at a Grand Slam title, yet his commitment to the cause has often been questioned and he has lost more five-setters than he's won (14-16).

The Australian Open has not been Agassi's favourite Grand Slam — this will be only his fourth appearance in 14 years — but when he did show the first time he beat Sampras in the 1995 final.

Britain have two hopes in sixth seed Tim Henman and No. 8 Greg Rusedski, yet neither have set the Australian Open alight in the past. Both have yet to get past the first week.

Richard Krajicek is back in town after missing the last two opens and if the injury-prone Dutch power-server can survive the physical stresses his game generates he could be a contender.

Yet even when he reached the semifinals here in 1992 he couldn't play because of a knee injury.

Croatian firebrand Goran Ivanisevic's big obstacle is himself.

To win seven matches will fully test the man with the biggest serve in tennis — he usually implodes in a



Andre Agassi (L) of the U.S. chats with his coach Brad Gilbert during a practice session at Melbourne Park venue for the Australian Open. Agassi the fifth seed meets Argentina's Herman Gumeny in a first round match on January 19 (Reuters photo)

torrent of invective somewhere along the line and has yet to get past three quarter-final appearances in nine visits.

"It's pretty open and nobody's the favourite," Ivanisevic says.

"There's no one you can point to and say he is going

to win it. "Pete's not here and you have several guys who can win this tournament."

"I can beat anyone when I am playing good but I can also lose to some strange guys, but that's me" he said.

Hometown pinup Mark Philippoussis reached his

first Grand Slam final last September in New York only to be beaten by compatriot Rafter for the U.S. Open.

His heavy serves and groundstrokes make him a threat, but he will have to harness the erratic elements that often undo all the

oomph he puts in. That leaves defending champion Korda, unseeded this year, but with Everest to climb following the scrutiny on him over his positive drug test.

But that was not the worst of it for the heart-on-the-sleeve Czech who has

docked the prizemoney he earned at Wimbledon but escaped a ban.

That only unleashed an Almighty backlash with the ITF announcing its intention to challenge its own appeal committee's decision not to impose a statutory 12-month ban.

TODAY AT	CINEMA TEL:463-4144	CINEMA TEL:463-4144	CINEMA TEL:5699238	CINEMA TEL:5677420	CINEMA TEL:5934793	CINEMA TEL:5934793	Rishon Yana Theatre TEL:4625155
	PHILADELPHIA '1'	PHILADELPHIA '2'	PLAZA	CONCORDE	GALLERIA 1	GALLERIA 2	
	Bruce Willis .. in	Adel Imam, Wafa' Amer & Kamal Shnawi .. in	Comedian Mohammad Huneidi .. in	Adel Imam, Wafa' Amer & Kamal Shnawi .. in	ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria Mel Gibson .. in	ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria One of Walt Disney's best movies	Watch out for the new play
	MERCURY RISING Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	ALWAD MAHROUS TRA' AL WAZIR Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ALWAD MAHROUS TRA' AL WAZIR Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	LETHAL WEAPON 4 Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	MULAN Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Dwight-hot United turn up the heat on Chelsea

LONDON (AFP) — Chelsea clung to their lead at the top of the English Premiership on Saturday but as they jetted off for a sunshine break in Tenerife player-manager Gianluca Vialli must have cast an envious eye towards Manchester United's white hot strike force of Dwight Yorke and Andy Cole.

While Chelsea needed a late wonder goal from midfielder Roberto Di Matteo to give them a 2-1 win over Coventry — United's goal greedy front pair simply gorged themselves in a 6-2 demolition of Leicester.

Yorke scored a hat-trick to take his season's tally to 16 while Cole is only one behind after grabbing two at Filbert Street.

It's the kind of partnership that wins championships and one that Vialli, who is down to his bare bones in attack, can only dream of.

With Pierluigi Casiraghi, Tore Andre Flo and Gustavo Poyet on the long term injured list, Vialli has only himself and Gianfranco Zola to choose from up front.

Chelsea's Italian boss was not fooled by Di Matteo's winner, which settled a bad-tempered match at Stamford Bridge that was marred by an amazing touchline scuffle involving more than 15 officials and substitutes from both dug-outs.

Coventry manager Strachan and Chelsea kitman Aaron Lincoln were both dismissed by referee Jeff Winter and are likely to face a misconduct rap.

On the pitch Darren Huckerby, scorer of two successive hat-tricks before Saturday, chipped Coventry ahead after nine minutes.

Frenchman, Frank Lebourd wallopped in a 25-minute equaliser for the home side in first-half injury time.

Coventry had a strong penalty appeal turned down in the second half and, after the touchline mayhem had subsided Di Matteo crashed.

Marzen a fierce shot deep in injury time to extend Chelsea's unbeaten run to 10 of 10-1 goal games.

"We were lucky, scoring a goal at the end of each half like that. We made heavy going of it," admitted Vialli.

Chelsea, unbeaten in 21 league games, now have 43 points, a clear of United, with

Aston Villa, who play Everton on Monday, a further point adrift.

With champions Arsenal fourth on 39 points after spoiling Ron Atkinson's return to frontline management by winning 1-0 at bottom club Nottingham Forest, this year's title race is one of the most open in years.

United, who thrashed West Ham 4-1 last weekend, were simply unstoppable at Filbert Street as they tore Leicester to pieces.

Yorke gave them the lead when he converted Denis Irwin's cross from five metres out after 10 minutes.

Leicester hit back with a spectacular Theo Zagorakis effort before half-time but in the second period United turned on the style.

Cole scored twice in 14 minutes before before Yorke grabbed his second from an acute angle after 63 minutes to kill the game.

Steve Walsh pulled one back for Leicester before Cole whacked a shot against the bar and Yorke gobbled up the rebound to complete his hat-trick.

Dutch defender Jaap Stam rounded off the rout with his first goal for the club in the final minute.

"I think a few of the teams at the top will be looking over their shoulders after that," said Cole.

United manager Alex Ferguson was rightly delighted with his front pair.

"The form of Cole and Yorke is becoming a potent force for us," he said. "They pose the kind of threat that will trouble anyone we come up against make life so difficult. In the end they could have ended up with five goals each."

Atkinson strode into the City Ground a little over an hour before kick-off sporting a sun tan and a grin the width of Nottingham's Trent river.

He should have felt quite at home after his Barbados holiday judging by the amount of sand on a desperately poor pitch but the charismatic 59-year-old marred his triumphant parade in front of the Forest fans by walking to straight to the away dugout by mistake.

His new charges didn't do much better as Arsenal dominated from the kickoff and

grabbed all three points when defender Martin Keown bounced a header into the net from a corner after 34 minutes.

Typically 'Big Ron' refused to be downcast afterwards, pointing to a gritty second-half fightback which saw Forest almost salvage a draw when Andy Johnson hit a post.

Atkinson, who confirmed Southampton's Carlton Palmer will join Forest subject to a medical on Monday, said: "I thought we battled very hard in the second-half but they're a hard side to go 1-0 down against."

Forest have now gone 19 games without a league win.

At Liverpool Robbie Fowler continued his rehabilitation with a hat-trick as the Merseysiders crushed Southampton 7-1.

Fowler was on target after 22, 37 and 47 minutes, taking his league goals tally to 101, with Dominic Matteo, Jamie Carragher, Michael Owen and Dave Thompson completing sorry Southampton's humiliation.

John Hartson was yellow-carded on his debut for Wimbledon who earned a 0-0 draw at Tottenham. After the match Wimbledon boss Joe Kinnear accused Spurs' French winger David Ginola of constantly diving in an attempt to win penalties.

"For somebody with so much talent and ability I find it amazing that the only time Ginola falls on the pitch is in the box," said Kinnear.

Hartson's former club West Ham continued their recent slump, losing 4-0 at home to Sheffield Wednesday who scored through Andy Hinchcliffe, Peter Rudi, Ritchie Humphreys and a Benito Carbone penalty.

Jamaican Dean Burton hit an 84th-minute winner at Pride Park as Derby beat Blackburn 1-0, while first half goals by teenager Alan Smith, his third goal in two games, and Lee Bowyer gave Leeds their 2-0 victory against Middlesbrough at Elland Road.

In Sunday's match Charlton bid to end their run of eight successive defeats when they take on Roud Gullit's Newcastle at The Valley.

Tyson returns from exile in triumph

LAS VEGAS (AFP) — Mike Tyson reignited his career Saturday, returning from boxing exile to knock out Francois Botha in the fifth round of their scheduled 10-round fight.

For most of the bout Tyson looked less like the fear-inspiring fighter he once was than the frustrated brawler who resorted to biting Evander Holyfield nearly 19 months ago.

He had to be pulled to his corner as he and Botha continued brawling after the first round, and Tyson trailed on all three judges' cards through four.

But with one short right to Botha's face, at 2:59 of the fifth, the 32-year-old former champion was back.

"I was winning," Botha said.

"Oh man what a fighter," he added of Tyson. "Oh my, what a dummy — I was going to beat him."

After frustrating Tyson in the first four rounds, Botha said, he got careless.

"I just walked into the punch," he said. "I was surprised. I really thought it was going to be easy."

"I knew that I was in control," added the South African, who fell to 39-2. I was slowly but surely getting a hand on the fight.

Maybe I got a little too cocky and I paid for it," Tyson posted his 46th victory — his 40th knockout — in 49 fights.

But his long absence from the ring showed. For a moment, it even looked as if the worst predictions of Tyson's critics might come true.

The two refused to come out of a clinch at the bell to end the first, and the ensuing scuffle saw security officers and Las Vegas police streaming in to form a cordon around the ring.

The ill-will carried over into the next round, when Tyson had a point deducted. But Marc Ratner, the executive director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission said he didn't think it was a dirty fight.

"It was just a tough, heavyweight fight," Ratner said.

Only one judge gave Tyson one round on the scorecards, but Tyson said he never had any doubt he could win.

"A tremendous amount of rust," he said. "I told my trainer, don't worry, I'll catch him late. I'll catch him late."

"I don't believe he was able to hurt me," Tyson added. "I knew I was in good shape and it was just a matter of time."

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Mike Tyson (R) of the US lands a punch to the head of Francois Botha (L) of South Africa after a hell ended the first round of their heavyweight fight 16 January at the MGM Grand Garden in Las Vegas, NV. Tyson won the fight by knockdown in the fifth round of their scheduled 10-round bout (AFP photo)

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Sydney coordinated traffic lights to impress IOC delegates

SYDNEY (AFP) — Sydney lavished IOC delegates with gifts and went as far as to coordinate green lights along routes dignitaries travelled in a bid to impress them, a former top Australian bid official said Sunday.

The 28 million Australian (\$17.6 million) dollars spent on the successful bid for the 2000 Olympic Games meant the city also spent much more than allowed under International Olympic Committee (IOC) rules influencing the votes of delegates, former New South Wales state Olympics minister Bruce Baird said.

If you divided the money spent on the bid by the 45 votes Sydney eventually obtained, the cost of each vote was more than 620,000 Australian dollars, Baird told The Sunday Telegraph.

And those figures made a mockery of the International Olympic Committee's \$240 cap on gifts to voting delegates, he said.

"Even during the bid process, I thought this (lavishing of gifts) was ridiculous," Baird said. "The IOC had a technical committee, which visited every bidding city and they ranked us number one. That should have been enough."

Sydney officials kept within IOC limits for gifts when it gave delegates didgeridoos (aboriginal musical instruments), hats, coats, and other sundries, Baird said.

"But, yes, we spent 28 million sucking up to them for three years."

The city wine and dined visiting delegates and made sure it had a presence at every Olympic-related event possible, Baird said.

It also went to incredible lengths to make sure everything went smoothly for dignitaries when they were in town.

"When IOC delegates came here, they were picked up at the airport, taken through the VIP area. We had co-ordinated green traffic lights, so they would think how close they

were to the city. "They were met by the manager of five-star hotels and taken to the best suites in the house. They were taken on helicopter tours around the sites and had lunch at the best restaurants."

Also Sunday, former New South Wales state leader John Fahey said he had never been told Sydney officials were approached for bribes by certain IOC officials.

Baird has claimed he was approached several times by people related to the IOC seeking financial sweeteners and has threatened to disclose the names of those people.

But Fahey, who is now Australia's federal finance minister, said Baird, now an MP, had never told him about any approaches.

"As a cabinet minister Bruce Baird was given a responsibility to assist me as premier," Fahey said. "Did he ever tell me? The answer's 'no'."

SPORTS IN BRIEF

French duo to defend laurels

LYON (AFP) — French world champions Hacine Cherifi and Fabrice Tiozzo will defend their world titles in February and March respectively, their manager Jean-Marc Perono revealed here on Sunday. WBA light-heavyweight champion Tiozzo will face an as yet unknown opponent on the undercard of the world heavyweight title unification bout between Evander Holyfield and Britain's Lennox Lewis at Madison Square Garden in New York on March 13. Perono said: "To be on the bill that night is exceptional." Cherifi, meanwhile, will defend his WBC middleweight belt against the man whose title he took last May, American Keith Holmes, in Washington on February 6. Britain's Robert McCracken is the likely opponent for the winner. Perono said: "It's not easy, it's true, but Hacine earned his world champion's belt and will win a second time against Holmes."

3 contenders to replace Salt Lake City

GENEVA (AFP) — Three cities have offered to stage the 2002 Winter Games in place of Salt Lake City, whose successful bid for the event has been soured by a welter of corruption allegations, International Olympic Committee (IOC) director general Francois Carrard revealed on Sunday. Austrian city Innsbruck, Ostersund in Sweden and Lillehammer in Norway are the three contenders. But Carrard again confirmed that there were no plans to remove the Games from the designated American hosts in spite of concerns that the corruption scandal may deter sponsors. Carrard said: "The IOC will not do it (change the venue) in any case." He said the fact three cities were willing to step in was nonetheless encouraging. "It shows that despite the current problems the enthusiasm for the Games is the same as ever," he said.

Karembu wins second Oceania Footballer of the Year award

SYDNEY (AFP) — Christian Karembu has been voted 1998 Oceania Footballer of the Year after his outstanding successes with Real Madrid and World Cup champions France. It is the second time Karembu, originally from the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia, has been handed the award by regional officials and media after taking the title in 1995. Karembu, a 27-year-old midfielder, had a season to remember last year when he won a European Cup winner's medal with Real Madrid and was a member of the French World Cup championship squad at France '98. Among other players to poll well were Australians Stan Lazaridis (West Ham), John Aloisi (Coventry City) and Ned Zelic (Munich 1860).

Bulls breakup continues as Spurs grab Kerr

CHICAGO (AFP) — The exodus has begun from the Chicago Bulls in the wake of Michael Jordan's retirement. Free agent guard Steve Kerr, who sank the series-winning jump shot to put Chicago past Utah in the 1997 National Basketball Association Finals, has struck a deal to join the San Antonio Spurs. WGN radio here reported.

The multi-year deal is scheduled to be signed on Monday or Tuesday, whenever the league and union have their contract on paper and signed.

With eight of 12 members of Chicago's dynasty unsigned, a mass exodus is expected from the Bulls squad that won six of the past eight NBA crowns.

Coach Phil Jackson departed in June, replaced Friday by Tim Floyd. Jordan retired days ago, leaving an unfillable void.

Six-time defending rebound champion Dennis Rodman, center Luc Longley from Australia and forward Scottie Pippen are among the other top players likely to be going soon.

Pippen has already been talking with the Houston Rockets. Kerr, 33, adds an outside threat to the Spurs' inside power of center Tim Duncan and 1998 NBA Rookie of the Year Tim Duncan.

No official farewell game for Klinsmann

BONN (R) — Former Germany captain Juergen Klinsmann said on Sunday he had been refused an official farewell game by the German Soccer Federation (DFB).

"I really would have loved to bid farewell before the fans in Germany but the DFB has refused," Klinsmann told German sports news agency SID.

"I am sad and bitterly disappointed," Klinsmann, 32, has played 108 times for Germany. He retired after last year's World Cup

finals in France and now lives in the United States.

The DFB informed Klinsmann by fax on Friday that he would not be granted an official farewell game.

"There will be no more farewell games for internationals," said DFB vice-president Franz Beckenbauer, adding that only Lothar Matthaus would have one when he retired.

The Bayern Munich libero has a record 130 caps for Germany.

Bakke wins World Cup slalom

STANTON, Austria (AFP) — Trine Bakke of Norway scored the first World Cup win of her 11-year career when she took the women's slalom race on Sunday.

Bakke, 22, locked in 22.84sec for the win, 0.04sec ahead of Sweden's Anja Paerson, who was timed at 1:23.88.

Paerson, a 21-year-old from Trondheim, was fastest after the first leg, but Bakke, a 24-year-old from Trondheim, was fastest after the first leg. Her birthday was celebrated this week, as second-best after the first leg. Her previous best performance was second place in a slalom at alpine last season. Bakke said she had revelled in the conditions. "I really love races like this one, where the snow is really hard, but it's just a great victory hasn't really sunk in yet," she said.



Trine Bakke

Germanians must unite behind World Cup bid — Beckenbauer

BONN (R) — Germany will stand a chance to host the 2006 World Cup finals if all forces in the country unite behind the bid, Franz Beckenbauer said on Sunday.

The legendary libero, who heads the German bid, said Thomas Bach, a leading member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), had offered to

and would act as an adviser. Others must work with us," Beckenbauer told German television ZDF.

Politicians, the Foreign Ministry, ambassadors in foreign countries and German companies with activities worldwide must support our bid."

Beckenbauer, the campaign director of

rivals England, said on Friday that Germany's bid was struggling and looking for a way to get back on track.

McGivan's comments came after German Soccer Federation (DFB) vice-president Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder suggested a deal with African nations which would involve Germany supporting African efforts for the 2010 finals if Africa backed Germany's bid for 2006.

South Africa have already strongly denied that they would withdraw their bid to host the 2006 event to support the German bid.

"We entertain the idea," Danny Jordaan, the chief executive responsible for the South African bid, was quoted as

saying in the London Sunday Times. Beckenbauer told ZDF: "We are not as loud and as aggressive as the English. The executive committee knows that Germany is the best choice. We have to intervene in an open and friendly way to make that point clear."

As well as England and Germany, six other nations are bidding for the 2006 finals. Five African countries — South Africa, Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Ghana and Morocco — are in the race as well as Brazil.

FIFA's executive committee will decide in March 2000 which country stages the event.

Ecevit wins vote of confidence, Turkey faces major tests

ANKARA (R) — Veteran Turkish leftist Bulent Ecevit's minority government was confirmed in office on Sunday, charged with steering the country to April elections viewed with deep foreboding by the powerful military.

The parliamentary confidence vote of 306 to 188 formally put an end to two months of uncertainty since the fall of premier Mesut Yilmaz's government, the fifth since 1995, on allegations of corruption.

"We will work to take Turkey securely to the April election by following an independent course," Ecevit, head of three governments in the 1970s, said after the vote.

The events of recent weeks have made clear his will be no simple caretaker role.

The secularist military, a firm "guiding hand" in Turkish politics, has expressed fears of a strong election showing by the Islamist Virtue Party. Only a week ago, the General Staff expressed something well short of confidence in the ability of squabbling mainstream politicians to cope with the challenge.

"What does the man on the street want?" commentator Ahmet Taner Kislali asked in the daily Cumhuriyet.

"Firstly, stability, secondly peace of mind. The man on the street does not want endless political arguments or governments that change every two days."

Ecevit's Democratic Left will govern with the support of two conservative parties, themselves bitter rivals — Yilmaz's Motherland and former premier Tansu Ciller's True Path.

Bickering between the two helped thwart Ecevit's first attempt to form a government in December.

At home, Ecevit faces a heavy first-quarter domestic debt repayment burden and fears over the country's banking system.

The Central Bank's move to take over management of the medium-sized Interbank has stirred rumours others could face difficulties because of reckless procedures.

Ecevit, demonstratively eschewing some of the trappings of power such as the prime ministerial Mercedes as part of an effort to dispel a cloud of corruption hanging over Turkish politics, has pledged to push through a 1999 budget and reform the social security system.

However, he will be hard pressed to push through a banking law opposed by True Path and breathe life into an ambitious privatisation programme.

Abroad, the weekend brought foreign policy news that will do little to cheer Ecevit or the military.

Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Ocalan, arrested in Rome in November, left Italy a free man.

Ecevit's greatest challenge

in the approach to April elections lies in reassuring the public and the military, who have carried out three outright coups in 40 years, that Turkish democracy is healthy.

Virtue, already the largest party in parliament, appears well ahead in informally launching its election campaign. The last month, the Holy Month of Ramadan, has seen thousands of Virtue activists going into the poorer areas of major cities offering charity and courting support.

The military forced the country's first Islamist-led government from power in 1997, in an action that fell short of a coup but made clear they would no longer be tolerated in office.

The Islamist Welfare Party was later banned under pressure from the military, only to re-emerge in much the same form under the name "Virtue."

The military is already mulling the danger of Virtue expanding its power base and, exploiting the divisions and personal conflicts within the secular parties, again pressing its claim to power.

The pessimists fear the military might yet lean on parliament to delay the elections until 2000 to allow electoral reforms that could hinder Virtue. But most feel it is too late in the day and personal political ambitions are too entrenched for any review.



ANOTHER FACE OF PINOCHET: Protesters wearing masks representing former Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher take part Sunday in a demonstration in London calling for the extradition of Pinochet from Britain to Spain. More than 500 protesters marched past parliament, where Pinochet's extradition case is to be reheard on Jan. 18, to a rally in Trafalgar Square (AP photo)

Yeltsin hospitalised with ulcer

MOSCOW (AFP) — President Boris Yeltsin was rushed to hospital on Sunday with an acute bleeding ulcer, a fresh health crisis that renewed doubts about his fitness to govern.

The Russian leader was in a stable condition in the Central Clinical Hospital, undergoing a course of anti-ulcer treatment, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

"When he was admitted to hospital he was examined with a gastroscop which confirmed the diagnosis," a Kremlin official told AFP.

"He has been strictly ordered by doctors to remain in his hospital bed over the next few days," the spokesman added.

The development was Yeltsin's most serious health scare since he was admitted to hospital on Nov. 23 with pneumonia, and underscored concern about his ability to effectively govern a nuclear power gripped by a deep economic crisis.

Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov played down Yeltsin's latest health scare, saying it had not triggered "any unusual situation" in Russia, according to ITAR-TASS news agency.

Interfax agency quoted the speaker of the Duma lower house of parliament, Gennady Seleznev, as urg-



Boris Yeltsin

ing Yeltsin to transfer his police, army and foreign policy powers to Primakov during his illness.

Yeltsin health concerns came into sharp focus in 1996 when he suddenly disappeared ahead of a presidential election runoff. It later emerged he had suffered a string of heart attacks during the hectic campaign, which forced him to undergo a marathon heart bypass operation that November.

Specialists here said his ulcer could have been caused by aspirin, often prescribed to patients following heart surgery, while an expert at the Rothschild Hospital in Paris said alcohol intake could also be a factor.

Moscow surgeon German

Basner told ITAR-TASS that Yeltsin's condition did not "mean an operation is necessary," adding that his recovery could take three weeks.

That could scupper Yeltsin's scheduled Jan. 28-29 state visit to Paris, his first trip abroad since an aborted Central Asia trip in October, but Kremlin officials declined to comment on the possibility.

The timing of the latest hospitalisation lent force to complaints by Moscow's ebullient mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a leading contender for presidential elections due in 2000, that Yeltsin "is not active enough."

On Saturday Luzhkov urged the ailing leader to consider stepping down early, saying: "There is a problem of early presidential elections. We all know it exists."

Late last month Yeltsin, then apparently enjoying a rare period of robust health, dismissed such pressure, saying in his first television interview in months that he saw "no grounds" for leaving office early.

Deputies in the leftist-dominated State Duma lower house of parliament, who are increasingly dismissive of Yeltsin's capacity to govern, in early December demanded a health bulletin on the presi-

dent, then recovering in a clinic from pneumonia.

Although the Kremlin could ignore the non-binding vote, the Constitutional Court is due to rule later this month on who has the power to determine whether a president is fit to rule, a point undefined in Russia's constitution.

Nevertheless, his visibly failing health has further undermined Yeltsin's political authority, severely battered by an acute economic crisis that erupted in mid-August and which saw the Kremlin cede power to the government.

And it has cast Primakov, who would become acting head of state should Yeltsin die in office or be judged unfit to rule, as a de facto vice-president.

While his heart operation initially provided Yeltsin with a new lease of life, the president has been in and out of clinics suffering from fatigue and a variety of infections and other ailments.

The recurrent bouts of illness have forced aides to cut back on Yeltsin's increasingly gaffe-strewn foreign trips.

At times incoherent during his recent trip to Central Asia, Yeltsin was forced to spend three weeks off work after almost collapsing from what officials said was "nervous exhaustion."

Further break-ins mark Israeli election campaign

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The homes of campaign staff of Israeli opposition leader Ehud Barak have been broken into just days after a burglary at a U.S. firm advising him ahead of May elections, police said Sunday.

Three secretaries and a volunteer working for Barak's Labour Party reported break-ins to police. All said their homes had been ransacked but nothing had been stolen.

The new break-ins follow a raid Tuesday on the offices of political consultants Greenberg Quinlan Research, and thieves made off with information on Barak's campaign against

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud Party.

Tuesday's break-in prompted comparisons in the Israeli press with the 1972 Watergate scandal that brought down U.S. President Richard Nixon, in which members of a White House dirty tricks team were caught trying to steal campaign secrets from Democratic Party headquarters in Washington's Watergate apartment complex. Nixon, facing impeachment over his attempt to cover up the White House role in the affair, resigned.

But Likud reacted with anger Sunday to mounting

speculation of a similar political dirty tricks campaign in Israel.

"Those who level such accusations should be ashamed of themselves — that's not how we conduct political debate in Israel," a party statement said.

"Any break-in is a crime and the place for burglars is in prison."

Barak spokeswoman Aliza Goren Sunday refused to make any political capital out of the latest burglaries.

"Labour Party central office is not going to make accusations about these break-ins — we are awaiting the results of the police inquiry," she said.

Israeli coalition partner refuses to recognise courts

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The spiritual leaders of an ultra-Orthodox party in Israel's governing coalition announced on Sunday that they would no longer recognise the authority of the Jewish state's courts.

"It is inconceivable that the government or the courts interfere in matters to do with Jewish law or tradition," the leaders of the United Torah Judaism Party said in a statement.

"It is null and void because it is contrary to our sacred teachings which have been passed down from generation to generation," they said.

The ultra-Orthodox press has long railed against the rulings of the Israeli courts, accusing them of left-wing and secular bias.

But it is the first time that ultra-Orthodox religious leaders have directly challenged the authority of the central institutions of the Jewish state.

Their announcement follows a series of rulings from Israeli courts which outraged ultra-Orthodox opinion last month.

A Jerusalem district court challenged the Orthodox establishment's dominance of religious life in Israel, by ordering the interior ministry to recognise 27 conversions

carried out by non-Orthodox rabbis.

And the supreme court ruled that a 50-year-old practice of exempting religious Jews from military service was illegal and ordered parliament to review the exemption currently enjoyed by some 30,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews.

But their challenge to Israel's highest institutions poses a headache for right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu whose minority government depends on the support of the United Torah Judaism Party's four MPs.

Netanyahu is also expected to depend on ultra-Orthodox votes in May 18 elections for the prime ministership.

In a string of recent opinion polls respondents cited the growing rift between religious and secular Israelis as the biggest threat to the Jewish state.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews represent less than 10 per cent of the population but their political weight in Netanyahu's government and their hold on key ministries such as the interior, labour affairs and housing has led them into growing conflict with secular Israelis.

The three religious parties in the Israeli parliament have a total of 23 MPs.

Britons detained in Yemen withdraw confessions

SANAA (AP) — Five Britons detained in Yemen in a case related to the kidnapping of 16 Westerners have withdrawn their confessions, a British diplomat said Sunday.

Four of the five men said the confessions were not valid because they were obtained under torture, said British Consul David Pearce.

The fifth man, Ghulam Hussein, said he was not tortured. It was not clear on what grounds he withdrew his confession.

The men were charged

Friday with associating with armed groups, forming a plan to commit murder and destruction, and possessing weapons.

They pleaded not guilty and withdrew their confessions, Pearce said.

"They do not confess to being members of any armed group, and they deny all that was said under torture," Pearce said in a telephone interview from the southern port city of Aden, where the men are detained.

Yemeni authorities claim the men are linked to a mil-

itant Islamic group that kidnapped 16 Westerners on Dec. 28, four of whom died in a rescue attempt by the Yemeni army a day later.

Their lawyer denies the allegation.

The leader of the Islamic group and two other men went on trial in Aden on Wednesday, charged with kidnapping and killing foreigners and forming an extremist Islamic group with the aim of harming Yemen's security and safety.

The five British suspects

— Hussein, 25, Mohsin Ghalaib, 18, Shahid Butt, 33, Malik Nassar Harhara, 26, and Samad Ahmad, 21 — were detained last month.

The father of Harhara, who also holds Yemeni citizenship, flew in from England and was able to visit his son briefly on Friday, Pearce said.

Pearce said he does not expect the case to go to trial before next week, after the "Eid holidays."

He said he was pressing for telephone access so the men can speak with their

families back home during the Eid holidays, expected to begin Monday. The "Eid marks the end of the Holy Ramadan month of fasting."

"I will also try to visit them during 'Eid and take them biscuits or sweets," Pearce said.

Lawyer Badr Basunaid said last week that "confessions" purportedly linking the men to the gang that kidnapped the Westerners were illegally obtained.

"Their statements were made without the presence of a lawyer and that is against the law," he said.

Arnun: A Lebanese ghost town in Israel's shadow

By Jacques Lhuillier
Agence France Presse

ARNUN — The once-bustling village of Arnun just outside the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon is now little more than a ghost town, inhabited by a few terror-stricken old people and the odd stray cat.

Last week the Israeli army razed another 14 homes, continuing the systematic destruction of Arnun begun in 1987 over fears that residents were aiding Lebanese guerrillas fighting the Israeli occupation.

"This is all that remains of my two houses," said Mohammad, a 60-year-old father of eight, pointing disconsolately at a heap of rubble.

Arnun Mayor Afif Hamdan said

some 7,000 people used to live in the town but today, fewer than 100 remain — most of them elderly, unwilling to move and resigned to their fate.

As one woman in her seventies put it: "The government and the rest of the world do not care about us."

Those who have stayed cling to a harsh and brutal life, eking out a meagre existence from their tobacco, wheat and olive fields amid the deafening pounding of artillery and the terrifying rattle of machine gun fire.

"How do you expect us to survive? They [the Israelis and its allied South Lebanon Army militia] have been destroying our plantations and olive groves for years and the [Lebanese] government does not compensate us," said one resi-

dent. Cars have not been able to travel the streets since 1985, when an explosion left the main road of the village blocked by piles of soil, broken concrete blocks and twisted metal wreckage.

Villagers who have them, use wheelbarrows to cart their few possessions through the snow. Others bundle everything on their backs. The village school, now down to four students, has little in the way of supplies beyond a crumbling and ancient French-Arabic dictionary and a time-worn small brass bell.

Virtually the only thing in sight that appears brand new is an Israeli flag, fluttering defiantly above the nearby hilltop castle where Israeli troops train their spotlights on the village non-stop — even in broad daylight.

Those spotlights illuminate the empty streets as patrols of Israeli troops and the SLA march by, firing their machine guns into the ground to scare the few remaining residents.

"I tremble every time the Israelis or the SLA militiamen comb the streets of the village, firing into the ground," said 20-year-old Mona.

"I wish I could leave and get married. I want to live," she said.

But that wish is unlikely to come true here in Arnun, where such hopes are shattered by the sound of Israeli artillery fire and frustrated by the silence of the rest of the world.

"Besides the Red Cross and a few journalists, nobody comes to see us," said one elderly villager. "They tell us to stay but they do nothing to help us."



Dead dogs used to end termite plague

LAGOS (AFP) — Civil servants in Nigeria's southwest Osun State have called in a traditional herbalist, or witch doctor, to end a termite plague that is destroying the office of the new governor-elect. The omnivorous insects have eaten their way into the government house at Oke Fia, Oshogbo, destroying carpets, chairs, eating their way through phone lines and damaging the structure of the building, according to a report in the Nigerian Sunday Times here. Civil servants have tried modern methods against the termites without success, the paper said, and last week they called in the herbalist, on whose advice they buried two dead dogs in the compound to draw away the termites. The trick worked for two days, but then the insects returned to the building, the paper said.

Controversy surrounds olive pit record

BRISBANE (AFP) — An army captain set a new record at the Australian olive pit spitting championships Sunday but controversy swirled around whether a light cross-wind may have had a role. Australian Olives marketing manager Chris Preston said judges were unsure whether Captain Doug Maddocks' 10.5-metre spit was assisted by a light cross-wind blowing at the Yallamudi olive plantation. But Preston said the judges had decided to award Maddocks the title anyway and history will show a new Australian record was set Sunday after the soldier added two metres to last year's mark.

Champion screamer meets president

TAIPEI (AP) — A Japanese woman who won a shouting contest by screaming "Cheer up, Lee Teng-hui" was more soft spoken when she met the Taiwanese president in person on Sunday. Mamiko Kobayashi demurely wished Lee a happy birthday during their brief meeting in a square outside the presidential office building in Taipei. Lee turned 76 last Friday. But she recalled her winning shriek for reporters, letting loose with a piercing Japanese rendition of her good wishes, which loosely translate as cheer up, or "let's go."

Vatican refuses demand to pay sewage bill

VATICAN CITY (R) — The Vatican has rejected a demand to pay a sewage bill of some \$23 million, saying its treaty with Italy exonerated it from such charges. "It's an age-old controversy and one unquestionably based on a misunderstanding, since the Lateran Treaty guarantees the state of the Vatican City free water services, both because it is a sovereign enclave and because it has no autonomous sources," chief Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said Sunday.

Navarro-Valls said in a statement negotiations were in progress to try to resolve a row he said was based on a "desire to apply to the Vatican City state, unilaterally, an Italian state law."

Pensioners' brothel busted

ORVIETO (R) — Italian police said they had busted a brothel frequented by pensioners and detained the 75-year-old madam and her 67-year-old boyfriend. They said the two had been placed under house arrest on charges of favouring prostitution in the central Italian town of Orvieto. Police involved in "Operation Rose Mouth" said the house had been used as a brothel for around two years and most of the alleged prostitutes were middle-aged women in their 40s and 50s. They were mostly in their 60s, gave presents of mobile phones, rings and jewellery to their clients, police said.

London denies intervention in Sierra Leone

LONDON (AFP) — British Foreign Office spokesmen denied reports that the UK was planning to intervene in Sierra Leone. The UK has not taken any action and does not intend to, a spokesman said. Sierra Leonean President Kabbah said Monday accused rebels were shelling towns in Freetown, the capital, and were anchored in the town.

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